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ABSTRACT

This is one in a series of eight discussion pamphlets produced by the Writing Across the Curriculum Project dealing with some of the issues connected with writing in the schools and their relation to learning. This pamphlet is concerned with various aspects of the Bullock Committee Report. The first section maps the various ways in which teachers have approached the Bullock Report's recommendation of creating a common language policy in their schools. The second section is concerned with some of the main ideas that lie behind the Bullock Committee's recommendations about language policies, including the relation of language to thinking, the role of the student's own language in new learning situations, and the problem of assessing written work. The final section, which describes the work of a group of humanities teachers who together examined writing, illustrates how discussion can influence what happens next in the classroom and how a language policy group can find a context for the consideration of students' work that is not solely concerned with assessment in the examination sense. (FL)

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SCHOOLS COUNCIL PROJECT
WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM 11-16

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Language Policies in Schools

Some Aspects and Approaches

- ED177553

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David Allen	Myers Grove School, Sheffield
D. A. Blackwell	Herod Burna School, Swindon
D. Chicken	Westerhope Middle School, Newcastle-upon-Tyne
Elaine Dunford	Central Foundation Girls School, London
E. M. Garnett	Wreake Valley and Community College, Syston, Leicestershire
David Halligan	Thomas Calton Secondary School, London
R. G. M. Jones	Chelsea School, London
Ramin Minovi	Sir Wilfrid Martineau School, Birmingham
Barbara Zussman	Institute of Education, London

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Contents

Introduction	2
1 Language policies: approaches and problems	4
Marching orders	4
What can teachers do to make a start?	6
What happens when they try?	15
A language policy in action	38
Who can help?	40
2 Key issues from the Bullock Report	43
Language and thinking	43
(a) Talking	43
(b) Writing	54
Assessment of written work	66
3 First moves towards a policy for learning through writing	75
Points of departure	76
Teacher-initiated writing	77
Self-initiated writing	88
Some relevant books	96

Introduction

This booklet is a collection of material from three Packs on aspects of the Bullock Report. These were produced by the Project team and their teacher–collaborators between Summer 1975 and Spring 1976, i.e. the first year after the Report was published. They represent first attempts at implementing some of the recommendations in the Report and many teachers have found them helpful in attempting to get a language policy going in their own schools. We have added a little, rearranged a good deal and left out what has become outdated. However, we want to emphasize that our Packs were produced as *ad hoc* material arising from work in schools and intended to be used in the course of the Project (which worked on 'across the curriculum' language matters from 1971–6 and therefore preceded and contributed to the work of the Bullock Committee). They are more in the nature of a running commentary on problems encountered than a coherent, comprehensive report. They represent the point of view of the writers and there are many things they could not, by their nature, take account of.

In the first section we try to map the various ways in which teachers have begun to approach the idea of building up a common language policy in their schools. The Bullock Report strongly recommended that every school should have one – but what it might consist of or how it might be got going are problems which every school has to grapple with for itself. It is often helpful though, to have someone else's experience to draw on.

The second section is concerned with some of the main ideas that lie behind the Bullock Committee's recommendations about language policies:

the relation of language to thinking;
the role of the student's own language in new learning situations;
problems of assessment in written work; we think the transcripts and samples of corrected written work raise important points for discussion – and action. Is there, for instance, a danger of a clash

between notions of writing in order to learn and notions of correctness? How can this be resolved?

Our third section describes in more detail what a group of Humanities teachers did when they started to look at writing together. The kind of questions they asked themselves about the writing, along with a representative selection of the pupils' work, suggests how discussion can influence what happens next in the classroom, and how a 'language policy' group can find a context for a consideration of children's work which is not solely concerned with assessment in the examination sense of the word.

As the Writing across the Curriculum Project drew to an end, it became clear that, as the Bullock Report had indicated, we were all only at the beginning of an important direction in education with regard to the role played by language: teachers of all subjects were, and are, being asked to consider how the talking and writing they ask their pupils to do affects what and how they learn. We were sorry we had to stop our work at this point of change, but we hope that this amalgamation of our last three Packs will be of some help to teachers who are continuing to focus attention in their own schools and classrooms on the issues raised by the Bullock recommendation for an agreed language policy across subjects and age groups.

1 Language Policies: approaches and problems

> 'We strongly recommend that whatever the means chosen to implement it a policy for language across the curriculum should be adopted by every secondary school.' (Bullock Report, Chapter 12)

Some local education authorities responded to this recommendation by asking schools for language policy statements. We think that the terms in which they asked for these and the discussion questions some have provided seem to show a lack of awareness of the complexities involved.

Although we agree that a direct request for a policy statement may stir schools into activity, the quality of discussion and the outcome produced by this kind of pressure may well serve simply to perpetuate an unthinking *status quo* or concern itself only with surface features such as corrections.

What we hope to do in this section is to give teachers and others some more detailed information about attempts which are being made to promote language discussions in schools in various parts of the country. We suggest ways of making a start, ways of continuing, who might help you. We report on the difficulties some teachers have encountered, and on some of the successes beginning to be achieved.

We hope that by presenting the problems, we have not appeared to be pessimistic but the enterprise is of too great importance to be treated with facile optimism. It is difficult; it needs to be a continuing and evolving process. Documents produced for local education authorities should not be allowed to interfere with its gradual evolution.

Marching orders

This is a letter which one local authority sent to all schools. With it were

four (A4) sheets of questions under the heading of 'Wider considerations for discussion by primary and secondary school staff'. There was also a model provided for 'the traditional language policy statement'.

Your Ref.
Our Ref. L/AC/BR January 1976

Dear Headmaster/Headmistress,

Three of the principal recommendations of the Bullock Report, *A Language for Life*, offer a particular challenge to all of us; they are:

(i) Every school should devise a systematic policy for the development of reading competence in pupils of all ages and ability levels.
(ii) Each school should have an organized policy for language across the curriculum, establishing every teacher's involvement in language and reading development throughout the years of schooling.
(iii) Every school should have a suitably qualified teacher with responsibility for advising and supporting his colleagues in language and the teaching of reading.

As a first stage in the implementation of these recommendations it would be helpful if Head Teachers, in consultation with members of staff, prepare written statements of the language and literacy policy of their schools. To assist you in this work, I enclose a paper which has been adapted from one issued in the ILEA.

It would be helpful if Mr X . . . could have these statements by the end of the spring term with the idea of producing a paper based upon them, which should be available for the autumn term.

The Advisers would be pleased to discuss the matter with you or join any staff discussions.

Yours truly,

Director of Education

Distribution:
To all Schools

What can teachers do to make a start?

This section is chiefly based on a four day 'language across the curriculum' course that the Project team helped to run for secondary teachers in the North East. Four days is a fair slice to take out of the middle of a school term and most teachers had already committed themselves to making a report on their return at the very least. From the start there was the sense that many wanted to do something more 'solid' – longer lasting than just a report, which would really affect the way that language was viewed in their school.

Our team had also been puzzling about ways and means of raising Bullock issues about talk and writing which would somehow take root and grow in schools into a shared recognition of their real value and usefulness – by teachers of all subjects.

So we worked hard in three regional groups, trying to map all the factors that would be involved. Different personalities, different kinds of expertise, different school organization, different insights – all these variables would affect the outcomes and might require different kinds of approach depending on the patterns they fell into. We started by asking teachers to jot down an outline of their school so that between us we could gain some idea of the range of possibilities. We quote some of these thumbnail sketches first because they provide a clear picture of the similarities and differences that exist between schools. No doubt you will experience one or two flashes of recognition as you read on. . . .

Looking at possibilities

School of 1200, broad band streaming from Year 1–5 in all subjects. No team teaching or integrated studies. Very exam based, with little evidence of any approach to teaching other than formal classwork. Very little cooperation between departments – except for Head of Department meetings.

In my school the 'language across the curriculum' issue was raised at a recent meeting of Heads of Department and Heads of School. Members of this committee were given a summary of the Bullock Report. The point was made that two members of staff were going on

a course (the one I'm on now) and would report back. *Possibly* a working party will be set up to consider a language policy.

'Language across the Curriculum' made up of volunteers from different departments. The Head of Science has already expressed interest but says he can't get his department to spend time considering language issues. I have a strong feeling that discussion (if and when it begins) will start on issues of marking and assessment and correct usage.

In my school the only formal communication between different departments is in one staff meeting per term. There is very little discussion on school policy – no committees, working parties, etc. Discussion which does go on is in the staffroom at lunch times. Occasionally these discussions start at 4 pm and several teachers will stay and chat. There are plenty of exchanges in views informally.

Since the Bullock Report the Head and Heads of Department are committed to some kind of language policy. So far this has taken the form of the sort of support that the English Department can give to the less able in other subjects:

remedial staff support in mixed ability lessons
encouragement to the less able to bring written work to remedial group English periods
the formulation of a common correction scheme.

The school has a good academic tradition.

In our school we already have a first year interrelated studies course which involves five English, three Geography, two History and one RE teacher. This seems a good place to begin.

Science Head of Department extremely concerned with low level problems – spelling and punctuation. 'Fill in Blank' worksheets very prominent in Lower School.

HE Department has already solicited help in preparation of worksheets and cards (mostly suitable for remedials). Social Studies Department – Integrated Studies Project underway. Much of Geography work already concerned with language problems. History definitely not a discussive/expressive talk situation.

The most interested are likely to be the Heads of Maths, Geography,

Physics and RI. Most other teachers seem to feel any meeting is an imposition. There has been no talk on Bullock and there's no copy in the school.

First steps

It's one thing to have a picture of your own school in clear focus behind your eyes – it's something altogether different to make up your mind to do something which brings *you* into focus with other members of staff – the Head, Heads of Department, members of your own department etc. Once the school contexts that we have just described were clear, it was important to discuss possible first steps that could actually be taken. For the following suggestions we have drawn on the possibilities as to what they might do, that occurred to teachers while they were on the course – partly as a result of several discussions that were held by the regional groups. We have also drawn on the logs or reports which came from them, or other teachers, about what *did* happen. Not very much perhaps in some cases, but in almost every case some action was taken.

We have arranged these comments in widening circles of influence, starting with the individual teacher and moving through possible areas of activity in his own school, then outside again into the region and work with like-minded teachers from other schools.

Clarifying our own ideas

Personal need to assimilate the idea of language policy. Need to find out more about what goes on in many classrooms.

Took one week to think about the course, realized how difficult it would be to translate an 'unreal' conference awareness into the complex 'reality' of school life.

Possibly I'm not yet sufficiently convinced of the crucial importance of the 'doctrine'. Find it hard to believe that dedicated teachers don't instinctively employ the methods we are looking for. Also cannot see that teachers will admit of shortcomings in their methods and/or recognize a possible improvement which implies previous limitations.

So – hope to work in my own department by example rather than by abstract dialogue.

Plan to do little else except maintain an interest, keep personality topped up, preserve a scepticism that the whole thing might be a way of saying something old in a new way.

I'm interested in looking at worksheets and trying to find out how much information they give you about what children have learnt.

The regional group could act as a seminar group in which we further our own thinking about the subject of language across the curriculum and not merely strategies within schools.

Most people seemed to have become suddenly even more aware of their inadequacies and wanted to learn more themselves . . . so we decided to go on with more meetings based on us and what we *did* know. M has volunteered to show us what she was up to in her department at our next meeting under the title 'Language in Home Economics' and A is going to lay before us evidence of his own teaching on tape.

Inside our own classrooms

Tape myself teaching and be ready to let interested parties hear the tape and hopefully be willing to allow themselves to be taped – the pool of tapes idea.

Tape some of my own lessons and think about the implications.

Consider how to tackle constructive group work with classes who will find it difficult because of their previous experience.

Mr M has taken to taping some of his lessons and reports that discussion on Reading for Enjoyment ranged far and wide. He now feels more confident that value exists in opening out discussions rather than dragging them along pre-planned lines.

We are interested that almost all these ideas about where to start in one's own lessons are to do with talking. Perhaps that seems the obvious – or

the most logical – place to start? For the sort of possibilities for how a group can study the writing that children have done in their lessons see section three of this booklet, 'First moves towards a policy for learning through writing'.

Inside our own departments

A reassessment of what is happening in the English Department – what are our aims in English? Are we achieving what we set out to achieve?

'A' feels too pressurized by needs in his own department to consider raising the role of language issue with other departments in the school. He's not convinced that he has at present the necessary degree of authority and detached observation within the school as a whole.

I made a list of aims and objectives for reassessment within the English Department itself for discussion at our next department meeting. Ensure that members of the department:

are aware of the work of the Project team
have discussed their findings and the implications
have gone through the process of listening to tapes, examining transcripts, categorizing writing, etc.
have collectively produced a policy statement which makes explicit the methods we intend to pursue and how we expect the children to benefit
have examined the practice of teachers in other departments.

This should leave little time initially for contact with the rest of the school staff.(!)

The English Department is itself short on drama/talk/role playing etc., and is predominantly concerned with the written language – lack of tradition, staff, pressure of work etc. There is a definite need for an organized workshop within the department to formulate an oral policy. Many of the aims of this course are implicit but not explicit within the work of the department.

I would like us to compare notes on the writing done in a particular lesson to try and see which child appeared to get most out of it.

Inside our own schools

Taking a formal approach:

After the course, reported to the Headmaster who supports fully the notion of moving towards a long-term goal of a language policy. The Head feels this will be best achieved by a series of contacts between the Head of English and other departments in the school.

Suggest group meetings with Head of Departments to discuss:

Bullock and general implications
aims of teaching within each department and exchange of ideas on 'successful approaches to learning'
ideas for areas of cooperation in the future
involvement of the rest of the staff in 'language across the curriculum'.

I shall ask for a working party to be organized from volunteers at the next Head of Department meeting. Work from there – democracy not dictatorship. Some 'older' Heads of Department will probably be difficult to move – but that need not prevent a beginning from being made.

I want to try and establish a body which has some influence and power in the school. I intend to use the Director of Studies as a frontman at our next academic committee meeting and hope to set up a working party as an experimental base for trying out different methodologies.

After the conference a forty-minute talk with the Head resulted in a request from him for a copy of the Bullock Report with the relevant passages marked. He then introduced the topic at a full staff meeting although in such a way that could be interpreted as backing up prejudices which were not necessarily helpful. Anyway the outcome was that interested staff were invited to see the Head and possibly to join a committee that was to be set up. Not all were allowed on (a lot of Arts teachers were rejected) and there is now a working committee consisting of K as convenor, and teachers of Technical Studies, Geography, Mathematics, Chemistry, Music, Remedial Work and the Senior Mistress. This committee has met twice and is now at the stage where its own working problems have become clear – for example, some of the committee have read round the subject and take for

granted in discussion, words and concepts which are new to other members. Some school problems have been identified and discussed, for example the demands made on pupils, particularly first years, to listen to 'teacher talk' and the lack of help over the change from small junior schools.

At the next Academic Committee meeting C outlined the concerns of the course and emphasized that:

> there was little recognition of such issues in the school and that all departments were involved, not simply English.

It was stated by some that department heads were aware of such matters as the variety of written exercises and were capable of making appropriate judgments themselves. C replied that there were many matters of common interest and his initiative mustn't be interpreted as an infringement of each department's autonomy but should be seen as a search for solutions to school problems by group efforts. *It was felt that methodologies were at issue as much as, or through language.* It is clear that 'language' is a highly sensitive area where teachers are concerned. Perhaps it would be better to discuss methodology instead?

Taking an informal approach:

The Head at B . . . needed little convincing of the value of a language enquiry. His advice was that progress ought to be made slowly, not by a direct frontal assault on other Heads of Department, but a gentle approach, perhaps through problems thrown up by the integrated course.

Chats on a personal level about how much or how little children talk in lessons; what that talk achieves; what people think children's writing in their lessons achieves.

In the second week back at school after the course, I talked with individual colleagues about issues raised at the conference and my personal reactions to them. I talked informally with the Head who, together with the Deputy, takes a particular responsibility for curriculum development.

A couple of weeks after the course I had a discussion with the Head of the Environment Faculty over the usefulness of the course. At the

end of the discussion he invited me into a future Geography lesson to observe his pupils working and talking. He is going to come to an English lesson.

Finding out what is done in other subjects – including methods of approach and giving information about what is being done in English and what the aims are in English. Problem solving as a joint effort, starting with basic problems and building to a more complex policy.

Inside our own regions

Regional Group A held their first follow-up meeting in December to tell each other what progress had been made so far. At their next meeting in January they watched a videotaped lesson made by a member of the group using Humanities Curriculum Project materials and discussion techniques. Two other teachers in the group are going to do some further documentation based on their own lessons for the third meeting (to which colleagues will also be invited) in February.

Regional Group B held their first meeting on 20th January – also to find out what everyone had managed to do. 'Most of the reporting back indicated very little or slow progress and often reflected the personality of the contributor.' Their next meeting is also planned for February and is also to be based on work provided by group members.

Regional Group C met on 28th January – that is, they *intended* to meet on that date but in fact only two members actually arrived as well as the group coordinator. Anyone who has worked over a period with a small group will know that this kind of absence – unpredictable beforehand but pretty devastating when it happens – is an endemic feature of such meetings, which has to be survived now and again. Often people have very good reasons for not being able to come to a meeting, though it is interesting to speculate whether the most powerful reasons are always the ones that are given.

However, on this occasion, those who did come each brought a colleague along and in the event spent three hours discussing problems and possibilities over 'a delicious meal'. We quote in some detail from their report which in many ways leads us on to the next section of the Pack:

An issue of our concern was what does one do after having started discussion about language in the school; colleagues had started in different ways – informal discussions, a working group of staff, an evening conference – *but what next?* It may be that the next stage is to draw attention to details (as happened to us when we listened to tapes, learnt about surface tension, etc.) and then further general questions of much greater depth will arise from these details.

Several suggestions were made as to how attention could be focused in this way:

An outside speaker to talk about a limited particular piece of work to a group of interested staff or a staff working party. Not a general talk about school policy but, for example, a concentrated thirty-minute piece on the use of language to enable the learner to make a concept his own and not a handed down snippet.

Suggestions to individual members of staff of particular ideas to try out – for example, writing for audiences other than the 'teacher as examiner' or different kinds of writing other than transactional.

Information to interested staff in the form of a brief paper containing six or seven paragraphs, each taking a different aspect of the subject, many of which could include specific suggestions for pupil work.

This group also went on to suggest possible 'next steps' for themselves:

1 The group could meet occasionally as a 'mutual support' group to discuss developments.
2 The group could also act as a 'seminar' group in which we further our own thinking about the subject of language across the curriculum and not merely strategies within schools. (This could include visits.)
3 In order to assist any developments in schools, colleagues could approach group members in schools or in the Institute to help in any way requested (for example, the Institute could as part of the course, pay for outside speakers to visit a school, or write/duplicate papers for use within a school).

They made the following decisions:

To follow up 1 and 2 immediately – a further meeting was arranged for 25th March 'for which one member of the group has offered to

make some tape recordings for discussion. It is also hoped to have available duplicated typescripts of unusual pieces of writing . . . over a range of curriculum subjects.

In addition to these regional group meetings which sprang directly from the original course, the advisers who helped us on that occasion and the Warden of a Teachers' Centre who was also a course member are arranging other meetings in their own areas which are designed to illustrate in a variety of ways what a crucial role language of any kind plays in learning.

What happens when they try?

In the last section we outlined ways in which teachers can make a start. In this section we are looking at the difficulties teachers often encounter after the initial steps have been taken – as one of the groups in the North East was already discovering, sustaining concern rapidly became the main problem. Here we are looking in more detail at ways in which teachers can sort out for themselves what the relationship between language and learning means to them, and from there how they can continue to shape a language policy through discussions with other teachers and through their work with their pupils.

One of the recurrent tensions in trying to promote language discussion and action in a school is between short-term and long-term aims. Although there may be no end to the journey – in the sense that schools and their ways of working will continue to evolve – nevertheless it is encouraging to notice the odd milestone. Both long-term and short-term goals are needed and the relationship between them will need constantly to be reconsidered as you go along. So a short-term aim might be to get teachers to tape record groups of pupils talking in their lessons so that there is material for group study and discussion on the role of talk in learning situations. But this really needs to be related to a long-term aim which may be something like this: 'Teachers of all subjects should be aware of the importance of talk in making sense of new ideas and information – and find ways of facilitating it in their lessons.' A long-term aim like this might influence the discussion of the tapes so that the emphasis shifts from evaluation to a consideration of more fundamental

issues. So the questions asked might be 'What kind of relationship do you need to have with your pupils to enable situations like this to occur?' or 'Could the teacher usefully intervene in this discussion?', rather than just 'How articulate are these children?' and 'How successfully have they answered the teacher's questions?'

A long-term aim should enable teachers to become 'active interrogators' of the material, rather than passive commentators, because they have a commitment to act.

David Evans is Head of Science in a comprehensive school. He is leading a language discussion group in the school. One of the Project Officers asked David how he came to be running this group:

> Well, I think it's a curious situation. I mean it's arisen, first of all because I did the OU course (on language and learning) . . . I mean I was deeply suspicious of what Margaret (the Head) was saying about language initially, I really was, and it had me worried. And then I suddenly found – well, being in the Open University thread, as it were, anyway I found this course on it, so I thought, right I'll do it. And that convinced me there was something in it. But Margaret on her own I don't think would ever have convinced me. . . . She might have persuaded me to go on a course, yes, possibly, but I don't think a weekend course would have been sufficient, quite honestly, to really get me to make a move on. I mean I really had to do quite a lot of reading on a very deeply planned course to get me to a point where I was willing to say, yes, I think there is something in this.

David recognized the importance of language but has it affected his teaching much?

> . . . mine hasn't changed very much, to be quite honest. It's taking years and years, I think, to implement some of the things I believe in.
>
> . . . I think to me the crunch is this – one's got to put a fantastic amount of effort and involvement into getting one's own department working in mixed ability and I think only when I've done that and shown that it's as reasonable as any other method, will people really start to take language seriously.
>
> . . . As far as I can see it the situations one creates for learning depend on what one believes about language and the way pupils learn.

. . . I think we've got to demonstrate that mixed-ability teaching or teaching with language in mind works and works better, which is a very long process.

As he would be the first to admit, David Evans is still engaged in working out for himself the way in which his knowledge about language relates to the way he should structure the learning situations for his pupils in the classroom. At the same time he has to be concerned about the other teachers in his department and about the language discussion group.

BN: But how much influence do you think you can have on the teaching style – if you want to – of people in your department – so that they would. . .?

DE: Not a lot really. I don't know if I'm being very pessimistic. Minimal, I think, quite honestly. They come very much with set ideas from many different schools and different parts of the world and they stick very much to what they know – as far as I'm concerned.

BN: Do you foresee that language discussion and experiments and, you know, the sort of thing we've been talking about could change their way of looking at this?

DE: I think it could – I think it's going to be a very long process.

As for the language discussion group, the 'sorting out' is going on there too. The long-term aims are not formulated; the short-term outcomes seem inadequate.

DE: I think this is one of the crucial factors, you know, that I really don't think there's time to really get to grips with this – not in a school like this. There doesn't seem to be sufficient time to be able to pass on enough information. I mean, this is one of the problems about running the thing which I'm running now. We meet about every three weeks, we manage to do something in about three weeks that I always worry is so sketchy and we're not really getting down to the bones of it. But if you try and push it down to the bones of it – say to people 'You should read books A, B and C' – which are the books which convinced me which obviously I want to share, then they just don't do it and there isn't time. I don't know how you get over this. I'm not convinced that by these meetings I'm

actually achieving anything. I'm just about keeping it alive, I'm not sure we're actually going anywhere.

BN: Do you have a particular end point in view?

DE: No.

BN: I mean you didn't say at the beginning 'We want to end by having a statement on language policy – as to what we think. . . .'?

DE: No. I don't think we're there yet. I think we've got to get . . . I think the first . . . well, I think that's an aim, but I don't think we're in any position at the moment to operationalize that – to make it an objective which we could get to – not in the foreseeable future anyway. I think we've just got to open it up and try and get people to do a bit of thinking about language.

BN: What do you envisage as the next steps for your discussion group on language?

DE: Well, I think the next thing we've got to do is to try and listen to these tapes and really see what that throws up. . . .

I really don't know where to go from there, to be quite honest. I think we're getting to the stage now – we've had two or three meetings – when it's either going to die or continue.

BN: You haven't looked at any writing from anybody's classes?

DE: We haven't because I was tending to concentrate more on talk at the present time. Because that's the thing which seems to me to really change the way the teacher's got to behave in the classroom if he's going to allow this to go on and I thought this was probably the first thing we ought to look at. Whether we'll easily slip over into looking at writing or not I don't know. But I think that will be even more difficult and I think there'll be more resistance there to accepting what I would call nice pieces of expressive writing. I think we'd be on stickier ground then in the Science department. People still expect, you know, the finished piece of writing about this, that or the other.

BN: What about you? Do you?

DE: I don't know what I want. I do try and look for in what the kids have done signs of writing that shows some sort of understanding – but rarely get it.

. . . What you've got to do I think, is to actually get down to trying to individualize some part of the Science department's work. The day I can get other teachers to say, 'Well, look, come along and have a look at how I do it in Physics', I stand a chance of convincing people. I think sitting down in the evening, you

know, with tape-recorded lessons and very nice transcripts produced by other people of lessons which took place here – which was very helpful – you know, I don't really think we're getting that far. I think you've got to actually demonstrate – they've got to see it going on in the classroom, you know, and see a class of twenty-eight, twenty-nine pupils, you know, at work and interested and talking and things really happening, so that they think, well, there does seem to be something in this.

The two concerns – 'What do I do in my lessons?' and 'How does the language discussion group proceed?' – merge here in David's suggestion of being able to invite other teachers into his lessons.

Teachers of different subjects visiting each other's lessons could be very effective. Not only would they get some understanding of the kinds of activities required of the pupils in other lessons, but they could also pay more attention to the pupils' use of language than they normally could.

Reports from schools

Constructing a language policy
by Dave Allen (April 1975)

To be sure that there is only one way is the first danger. To act as if what *any* other establishment has done is appropriate without careful preparation and adaptation is a fairly certain way to fail. What is said in discussion to lead to a common policy depends upon the people taking part and the proposer must listen more than talk; the very language in which the thoughts are couched may smooth or crinkle the way.

I had discussed informally after I had got to know other teachers (mainly Heads of Departments but not entirely) the kinds of inconsistency and conflict built into the curriculum which were perpetuated in absolute ignorance. I asked gentle questions and outlined briefly the way our conception of English had changed and apologized (genuinely) for the lack of explanation of that change. English teachers have been too busy writing clarion manifestos to explain.

There began to evolve very tentative, spasmodic discussions about the different activities in Geography, History, Science and English. The

fact that other teachers spoke and listened was because in quite other activities we had gained some mutual support and respect. There was no suspicion of me personally though there was confusion and a lack of confidence. Interest was expressed in hearing my views at some length.

Alongside these small moves I was also letting it be known among the hierarchy that I believed teachers of ability were not being given scope to develop and to show what they could do. My school is very centralized and hierarchical with most meetings inclined to monologue – I felt the deadlock of passive acquiescence needed to be broken and said so. So coincidentally (?) did others and out of the blue the Head proposed a Curriculum Development Committee to look at possible ways forward. There was clear suspicion that this might be a 'safety valve' ploy but I tried to persuade others that we should proceed as if it were a genuine chance. A small subgroup of Heads of Departments were to suggest terms of reference. It was suggested the committee look at aims of the school, evaluate the extent to which we were or were not achieving them; consider, if necessary, alternative means including mixed-ability, integration etc. I also asked that we consider the role of language in the school's activities and suggested the formation of a language policy. (This was pre-Bullock – when the report came out recommending such activities 'officially' I was seen not as a prophet in the desert but John the Baptist.)

I was appointed to the committee and we have met now some eight times for about two hours each time. I have taken a middle line throughout and tried to antagonize no one. This again derived from a genuine interest in other people's concerns. I do not believe I have the answers and that the best answer for any school is near the middle of the spectrum available there. Ideal solutions are useless if they do not have the convinced hearts of those who implemented them.

When we came on to the language policy, I was asked to say what I wanted the school to do, as the expert in language. I took some care to outline the following points:

1 Every piece of learning takes place through or with the aid of English.
2 We do not know what other departments seek so we are often at unconscious loggerheads.
3 Though language is clearly so crucial, little training was given in how to look at the specialized language of the subject.
4 What was important was to find out with each other what we were

trying to do and how we were doing it, and it would be quite wrong for me to tell anybody what they ought to be doing.

We then discussed the role of *talk* in education and got interesting support from Craft and Housecraft teachers. We have now begun to tease out a consensus that getting confident constructive talk in our first year *as a priority* is a reasonable investment of our energies. We are to go on to think about *how*.

Someone else raised the bulk of Bullock and we are to read the relevant sections when available.

General points I have persuaded myself about

1 Refuse to present a document from the point of view of English. Make sure any document is the product of collaboration across departments.
2 Avoid jargon.
3 Listen.
4 Say what you mean. Manipulation of others by *mock* mildness is the way to get a document produced, but not to get a language policy in operation.
5 Do not present the LATE (London Association for the Teaching of English) document on a language policy. It is prescriptive and closes doors fast.
6 If you must write something call it 'Some Ideas . . .' or 'A Discussion Paper'.
7 Do not bring in an 'expert'.
8 Think long, slow and small. Do not introduce the issue to a full staff meeting.
9 Each school *has* its own 'language policy', silent or manifest. The first thing to do is to talk about the existing silent non-policy.
10 The English Department should have talked about language in their own curriculum area and feel they have come to some balanced, unifying description of the different elements.

Further along
by Dave Allen (January 1976)

When I reread the piece I wrote last Easter about what I was trying to do in my school and what I felt were the guiding principles, I cringe at the easy way I accepted the long-term nature of the task of implementing a

language policy. I still think that it is long term; but having carried the process on I realize that I was, if anything, underestimating the complexity and difficulty of what I had undertaken.

I feel uncomfortable, too, when I compare my basic list of principles with what I have actually found myself doing. Again, I feel that if there is to be a real language policy, it is still imperative to begin with the present unacknowledged language 'policy'. Careful slowness still seems to me to be the appropriate strategy, small-scale discussion the basic tool. What I underestimated was the natural pressure to follow existing procedures and the extent to which this would become irresistible.

I was, if I was to prove my seriousness, compelled to go along with the ways serious business is conducted in this school – the matter is discussed with Headmaster, aired at a meeting of Heads of Departments, laid open at a staff meeting. These are unconvincing media for development here and I preferred to work in other ways. However, I was asked repeatedly to address the various groups; my reluctance had no meaning in this context and I certainly wanted to show my seriousness.

A sub-committee on Curriculum Development had seemed an appropriate place to begin. The discussions were exploratory, open, encouraging. The general attitude outside the committee was that our discussions would be futile and would change nothing. The pre-emptive attitude has turned out to be the crucial factor, covering as it does deep-seated ideas concerning the role of subject autonomy, and most particularly the fears of what change will bring. If we were to examine the reasons why most people teach a particular subject, the most frequent reason would be interest at school and college. As a basis for asking the question 'Why?' about a subject, that is not a promising start.

As part of our discussions I have come to recognize more about the assumptions upon which schools operate through the teachers – teachers being the main element in the composition of the ethos or character of a particular school. There is no necessity for a subject teacher to question the subject. Thus, I have been unable to ask questions, however tactfully, and however pleasant the relations, without causing discomfort; and there is an easy place for any teacher to hide from discomfort – the teaching situation.

I don't know whether it is the same thing but I have sensed that the

questions I have been asking are felt to be irrelevant to the process of teaching. For example: what is happening when a pupil takes notes? Does a pupil actually record what he sees and understands when he records an experiment in traditional form? Is discussion the same thing as question and answer?

What I have found most dispiriting has been the low level of thinking about education that has been typical of the discussions. Alongside that is an apparent lack of any feeling that anything is wrong.

What I am documenting of course are *exactly* the reasons why the pursuit is long term. I foresaw them in general but I am nevertheless worn down by them in their endless particularity. I do not believe that I have the answer; I have not found that other subject teachers are often aware that there are any questions.

The last two terms have been dispiriting but in trying to evaluate what has happened, I have returned to firmer belief in my sense of the difficulty of the task and the possibility of change. Certainly a few people have indicated interest in talking about talk. When I am tempted to be depressed about the tiny step forward, I need to recall that I know of no convincing examples of actual cohesion on language in a school except those training children solely for examinations and employment. Now there's a thought.

The 'Marching orders' with which we started this section have given an impetus in some local authority areas to discussion groups of staff trying to formulate a language policy. Whether the end product – a policy statement – and looming deadlines will stifle the tentative, evolutionary approach remains to be seen. If the production of a policy statement by a school is regarded as the end of the matter, then the request will have done more harm than good. A definitive policy statement cannot usefully be regarded as an ultimate aim.

Andrew Macalpine's school had begun to work on a language policy well before receiving a formal request to do so from the Inner London Education Authority. We print three consecutive reports from the Head of the English Department and his deputy to show how the teachers' ideas changed as a result of the continuing discussion.

Language across the curriculum at Thomas Calton School
(first report) by Andrew Macalpine

'Every school already has a language policy' is not an original quote but one which I bear in mind whenever thinking about this issue. The point that any one school has reached must be the starting point for that school's further development. The following notes (1–12) should be considered only within the context of Thomas Calton's development. They may well be inappropriate in other situations.

Thomas Calton has:

(a) a heavily creamed intake
(b) mixed-ability classes throughout the school
(c) Integrated Studies in Years 1 and 2 (involving half the week for each year)
(d) a considerable amount of 'team teaching'
(e) Mode III English
(f) a very high level of staff participation in decision-making.

The above is intended to indicate not how successful or unsuccessful we are but rather the kind of attitudes that already prevail.

1 The Head and Deputy Head of the English Department decided to try to set up a 'language across the curriculum' discussion group which, hopefully, would lead on to the production and implementation of a policy. For various reasons it was decided that the Deputy Head of the Department would set up this group.

2 Amongst others, our reasons for wanting to set up such a group were:

   (a) The first five Years are taught on a mixed-ability basis and this throws up many problems related to language.
   (b) English is part of Integrated Studies in Years 1 and 2 and there is considerable anxiety over its position.
   (c) The low level of numeracy in the school and the feeling shared by many, both inside and outside the English Department, that SMP, in use throughout the school, is irrelevant linguistically.
   (d) The enormous production of worksheets (particularly in Integrated Studies) because of the lack of published materials.

(e) A high measure of agreement within the English Department and in many other departments on the need for such discussions.

3 It was decided that the group should be as representative of the different areas in the school as possible. It was an indication of the considerable interest in language on the part of the staff that even though the notices about the group were only left on our noticeboards a short while (to avoid being swamped with so many volunteers as to make discussions unworkable) there were only two or three areas or departments that we had to approach personally – the rest had signed up. The result was that we had a group of about twelve staff – sufficiently representative for any other member of staff to feel able to contact the group.

4 Before the first meeting the twelve were given LATE's policy document (quoted in full in Barnes *et al*, 1971) to read.

5 The first meeting was attended by all our representatives and they were asked what problems particularly affected them and the areas they 'represented'. This led to:

(a) mixed-ability situation. This was seen as a key issue by many.
(b) (a) led to Integrated Studies and then on to worksheets and a close look at the relation between Integrated Studies (Years 1 and 2) and the rest of the school.

6 Subsequent meetings (three of them) have dealt with: worksheets (again), resources (particularly visual but including use of rooms!), mixed-ability and Integrated Studies (again), Nuffield Science (Head of Science presentation), 'stretching' of brighter children, what form remedial help should take.

7 Attendance at these meetings has declined from meeting to meeting and at the last one the English Department members were as numerous as those from other areas.

8 A Staff Association meeting attended by about 70 per cent of the staff has revived and stimulated interest in 'language across the curriculum'. The Deputy Head of English described what had been happening in the meetings and the response was very positive. In addition preoccupations of those who had not been involved

emerged, for example, notions of correctness, West Indian dialect, etc.

9 The next two meetings were spent preparing for the second Staff Association meeting on 'language across the curriculum'. We had decided to invite Nancy Martin and Tony Burgess from the London University Institute of Education, both of whom have spent a considerable amount of time working on the Writing across the Curriculum Project. We had a look at some of the Project materials at the first of these preliminary meetings. At the second we sorted out some examples of different kinds of writing from our own pupils which we felt it would be useful to look at with Nancy Martin and Tony Burgess. These were sent off, prior to the meeting, to our two speakers.

10 The Staff Association meeting was very successful (in spite of somewhat adverse publicity given by the rather complex 'language across the curriculum' chart we had been displaying for the ten days or so leading up to the meeting). It was held after school and attended by thirty of our fifty-five staff (many of whom have at least two after-school meetings a week). Many of those present were introduced, for the first time, to notions such as 'transactional', 'expressive', 'poetic', etc. The questions which followed indicated that, far from being intimidated by the theory, many members of the staff (and by no means only those in the English Department) were hungry for terms in which they could develop their understanding of language.

11 The next two or three days resulted in more talk about language (liberally sprinkled with technical terms!) than I have ever heard in a school.

12 Where now? What next? Such cries were heard near the end of the Staff Association meeting and frequently afterwards. My own view has certainly changed:

(a) I don't believe we should work just towards a policy but towards an increased understanding of language and its role in learning (this latter point only touched on so far). One's ultimate aim must be to involve all staff in this question and that is a very long-term goal.

(b) There are no simple solutions. Available 'experts' are looking at language and producing models which may help us analyse what goes on in schools. The *application* of any theory which we find relevant is, as always, in our own (i.e. the teachers') hands.

Language across the curriculum at Thomas Calton School (second report) by Andrew Macalpine

Since my first article eight months ago our efforts have been directed towards producing a questionnaire for the school's various subject departments. I say '*our* efforts' but I should make it clear that after the initial planning which was done jointly (by the two of us), the Deputy Head of English, Dave Halligan, has had responsibility for the production of relevant papers and reports and for the organization of meetings. I will return to this question of responsibility later.

Dave produced the questionnaire after two meetings had been spent discussing the best ways of involving departments in the formulation of a policy statement for ILEA, and of encouraging more discussion about language amongst staff. These planning meetings were not well attended, except for the usual (and very welcome!) English department contingent. Nevertheless, I feel that the questionnaire that has emerged is very worthwhile!

Language policy across the curriculum

Revised questions for departmental discussion:

1 Can you define the language skills demanded by your department in terms of demands on:
   (a) listening
   (b) talking
   (c) reading
   (d) writing?
2 To what extent can your department help in the teaching of reading?
3 Can your department make more use of work in small groups?
4 Can your department make more use of talk as part of the learning process?

5 How much does the work of your department encourage teachers to talk to individual pupils?
6 What attitude does your department have to non-standard English in speech and writing?
7 What sorts of questions should we ask, what sorts of assignments should we set to produce the most effective *learning* situations?
8 Are we asking for too narrow a range of writing from our pupils; in particular when we neglect poetic and expressive writing in favour of transactional writing are we asking children to run before they can walk, to parrot the language of teachers and textbooks, regardless of whether or not that language means anything to them? (I am sorry about the complexity of that question and its jargon – examples of expressive, poetic and transactional writing are appended – see also Section 3 of the language group report.)
9 What can we do to get away from the banda worksheet and to improve the quality of our home-made resources? Do we need more sophisticated reprographic equipment?
10 What areas has the language group not yet discussed which it ought now to turn its attention to?
11 How has mixed-ability grouping affected your answers to the above questions?

These questions, which are an attempt to communicate with the rest of the staff, do not represent the thinking of any one member of the language group but were devised by those who attended the two meetings. In other words, members of the group were happier with some of the questions than others. It should also be remembered that, as I stressed in the first article, each school situation is unique and what may be relevant in one school may actually be harmful in another. At our school members of the language group will be offering departments help with their discussions on the questionnaire – particularly with rather off-putting questions like 1 and 8.

Language across the curriculum talk has in fact featured very little since last summer (apart from one refreshing and encouraging report from a Biology teacher who went on a one-day Children's Writing Course) and we are now pinning our hopes on the response to the questionnaire and on the interest that is being aroused by ILEA's follow-up to Bullock. Dr Birchenough, in his letter to schools, quoted a piece from Bullock: 'each school should have an organized policy for language

across the curriculum, establishing every teacher's involvement in language and reading development . . .'

A policy document does not, in practice, 'establish every teacher's involvement' and I feel increasingly that, while it may encapsulate the views of a particular group at a particular time and even give guidance on specific issues which will outlive that group of teachers, it can never really be more than a point of reference. There is another quote from the same chapter which gets us, I feel, closer to the problem: 'The effort a child needs to apply in learning language must derive from the satisfaction of evolving from helplessness to self-possession.'

This is an enormous undertaking and the truth is that language is at the *centre* of any educational system we may devise. It is not just another aspect of school life like uniform, books, or afternoon games. When we make statements about language we often expose the heart of our educational philosophy. Language across the curriculum discussions aim to bring about increased understanding of how learning takes place and how best to bring it about. That is a *continuous* process and that is why it is so important that each school should appoint someone with specific responsibility for this language development with plenty of school time made available for working with staff (ensuring, amongst other things, that they come to meetings!)

Dave has done as much as anyone could have done, given that he has a full teaching timetable and other departmental responsibilities which it has been impossible to release him from.

Certainly, in our school, given the latent and manifest interest of many teachers (not all of them, by any means, in the English department) we *could* make much greater strides. As it is we are still dealing far too often with those already converted.

We asked Dave Halligan, the Deputy Head of English, whom Andrew mentions as being very involved in the organization of the language policy meetings, for his view of what was happening. His comments, in pointing out the complexity of the situation, add a very useful further dimension by drawing attention to the influence of the individual perceptions of the teachers involved in the discussions.

Language across the curriculum at Thomas Calton – a different viewpoint
by Dave Halligan

Although Andrew and I have worked closely together to establish a language policy at Thomas Calton, I would be inclined to describe what we have done and the stage we have reached at the moment from a different viewpoint. That fact itself is revealing of a problem which must underlie every attempt to formulate such a policy. Bullock on language and learning makes the point that:

> It is a confusion of everyday thought that we tend to regard 'Knowledge' as something that exists independently of someone who knows. 'What is known' must in fact be brought to life afresh within every 'knower' by his own efforts. (4.9)

If that is true for school students it is no less true for their teachers. As discussion progresses each teacher in his or her classroom or as a member of a team is going to have something of a personal approach to matters to do with language, whether writers of policy documents wish them to or not. Moreover, language is so much at the heart of the learning and knowing done by teachers as well as students that very strong feelings are generated whenever discussion of such matters moves beyond statements of personal opinions to a genuine questioning of our classroom practice. As we attempt to establish the sort of systematic policy that Bullock recommends we are immediately confronted with the same complex of knowledge, experience and relationships that we find in our classrooms.

The questions that Andrew has included in his article were originally circulated with a summary of the discussions from which they arose. As I read them in isolation now they appear a very mixed collection indeed. This again reveals something of the complex situation which produced them.

Each question relates to an area of concern amongst the teachers at our school, but they also reveal the different approaches to language that are current at the stage of development we have reached. The first question is a good example, particularly as we place it alongside question 8. Looked at together they may reveal a divergence of opinion within the school. The first question represents a behaviourist strand in the thought of some members of our group. Behind it lies, I feel, an idea that, if only

we can get it straight in our minds what we want the students to be able to do, we can go ahead and systematically teach them to do it. Along with that goes a notion that the performance of our students can be measured against these goals and the effectiveness of our teaching can be assessed. By contrast, the inclusion of question 8 in the list suggests a desire to change our attitude to the learning process so as to centre our approach on the students' experience of learning rather than on our perception of what they need to know.

If we are to be true to the spirit of the quotation from Bullock in my first paragraph, we must be prepared for both approaches to exist even if neither of them reflect our own opinions. It may well be that in the changing situations that exist in schools, particularly in inner-city schools, some sort of final policy document should not be our main aim; continuing discussion may well be more useful.

Andrew has stressed the uniqueness of each school situation. I would wish to stress the individuality of each of the teachers involved in the learning process of trying to establish a language policy across the curriculum.

Dave Halligan's comment that 'some sort of final policy document should not be our main aim; continuing discussion may well be more useful' raises again the question of formulated aims. While Dave may well be right ideally, it is worth noting that the questionnaire and the sense of urgency in the discussions at Thomas Calton School seem to have arisen since the ILEA request for a policy statement (although discussions had started at the school before that). Certainly one hopes, fervently, that once some kind of statement has been prepared for the local authority, schools will not regard the matter as closed (especially as the statement may have little to do with what actually goes on in classrooms), but as a way of getting teachers started on discussion it may be valuable in that it provides a compelling short-term aim.

We've already quoted from David Evans, including his comments on the difficulty which he is experiencing in keeping the language discussion group going – his local authority have made no move to encourage schools to work on a language across the curriculum policy.

Further support for the view we have expressed for the need for both

short- and long-term aims comes from Mike Torbe, writing from his experience as an advisory teacher, who stated very forthrightly:

> The only profitable way in is action research. But the only profitable action research is the one that has visible consequences for tomorrow's teaching *as well as* long-term consequences. Thus, exploring teachers' questions ought to produce not just critical comments on existing questions which imply yes/no answers, but should also suggest questions which *don't* – such as, 'Which part do you remember?' or 'Did it make you think of anything else?'. Exploring ways of structuring writing, rather than criticizing sterile ideas, should suggest alternative modes (logbook, running record, branching diagrams) and how they might be introduced. Thus the working group can be seen as making a direct input to the major problem of teaching – what do I do tomorrow?'

We end this section with two pieces from the Head of English at a Midlands comprehensive school. The first is an account of his attempts to encourage language discussion in his school written for the Project Team. The wry humour and tempered optimism of this account, together with the writer's social awareness and his philosophical acceptance of difficulties gives a rounded and human picture of a school at work. The second piece is the report he wrote for his colleagues in the school after their first 'language across the curriculum' meeting.

Getting started on a language policy across the curriculum
by Ramin Minovi

I suppose it was my own fault really. I first made notes about a whole-school policy on language in the summer of 1972 sitting in the garden drinking bottled Whitbread and reading *Language and Learning*. I hadn't read *Language, the Learner and the School* at the time. Then the Head retired unexpectedly, the Authority introduced a chaotic scheme of reorganization, and everything but survival got shelved for the best part of two years.

One of the first things the new Head did was to ask for departmental reports, and when I sent in my first one about Christmas 1974 I spent some space on outlining the responsibilities of other departments for the language development of the children. He wrote on it something like, 'I agree, but English Dept. must give a lead. Consult with DH.'

On 18th February the Bullock Committee Report was published amid such a blaze of publicity that within a week at least five of our seventy-five staff had heard of it. I'm not joking: an event in the educational world has to be pretty stunning to make that much impact on the staff of a Midlands comprehensive school.

As a result, just before the end of the Easter term, the Deputy Head and I got notes from the Head asking us to look into this curious 'language across the curriculum' business. I lent the Deputy *Language, the Learner and the School* and my copy of Bullock; he hefted it thoughtfully in his hand. 'We ought to get one of these for the staff library,' he said. 'How much is it? Christ, five pounds.'

A week or two passed. Then, ten minutes before a meeting of Heads of Department, the Deputy asked if I would speak about LAC. Summoning up an ostentatious show of diffidence, stammering and mumbling like Brando ('I coulda been a contender, Charlie') I introduced the topic: it wouldn't do at all to let on that I or anybody else had *thought* about this beforehand, that it might actually affect their lives, or be dangerous in some other way. Even so, or maybe *because*, it stirred a surprising amount of interest. The Heads of Maths and Science got quite excited and started talking about spelling, always a good sign. Several others said, 'What? A spelling purge throughout the school? Good idea.' and gave it their blessing. The Craft, Domestic Science, Art and Geography departments ignored it completely. I lent out my last few copies of *Gnat Killers*. A committee was set up: Deputy, Head of Maths, Head of Science, Head of Lower School History (we're hierarchy-mad in our place), Head of Craft and myself. We met in the autumn term (late September) to decide on action. In the meantime I had talked casually to perhaps twenty staff, including members of the committee (I think this is probably the most important preparatory work). The most significant remark came from the Head of Science: 'They're not learning anything by the present methods we're using, so we might as well give this a go.' From a very Tory middle-aged Welshman, Head of Science since the school opened sixteen years previously, this indicated the first stirrings of an almost overwhelmingly daring spirit of exploration and enlightenment. Where are you now, Umberto Nobile? Never shall it be said that Captain Oates died in vain.

First 'working' meeting of committee: 26th September 1975. I had photocopied part of a tape transcript of a Nuffield Science lesson in a

primary school. This was far enough from home, I felt, to allow fairly free criticism. I also had two sets of the pamphlets from the Schools Council project, a few quotations from Barnes, and a list of possible projects in areas of concern, something on the following lines:

(a) The overinsistence on the use of technical vocabulary by insecure/unaware teachers; this seemed fairly safe. Only the probationers would admit to being insecure and nobody would admit to being unaware.
(b) The suitability or otherwise of textbooks in use in the school, paying particular attention to their language; similar consideration of duplicated material produced in school – was it better tailored to the children's needs, or did the teachers fall into the same traps?
(c) A look at the extent to which talk is used as a means of learning in *our school*. They shied away from this a bit. We all know that teaching in many departments, from First Year onwards, is by dictation of notes.

Open/closed questions came up here; I was censured for using jargon, and had to explain the term. Even the Deputy – three years in a college of education before coming to us – had never heard of it.

There followed the usual teacherly talk about bad pupils/eccentric teachers I have known, spelling, whose fault it was if the kids write poorly, standards, and so on; but at the end of it we had agreed to produce examples of textbook work for a proposed seminar, plus a list of 'technical vocabulary' under the heading 'Things we all do wrong', most of the items to be unnecessary use of technical terms, undeclared use of technical terms and textbook phrases, unwillingness to abandon safe ground of subject language, and so on.

Next meeting, 6th November. The Head of Craft's list of 'Things we all do wrong' began:

1 Incorrect stance before the class – we are inclined to loll about on the desk instead of standing up straight.
2 Incorrect dress: even in the workshop we should wear ties.
3 Use of colloquialisms and local slang.

In fact, he didn't produce this list at all in the meeting where he said practically nothing. He only showed it to me when I tackled him after-

wards about his lack of involvement, explaining that when he heard what we were saying he realized he'd got it all wrong. In fact, many of his other ideas were very good.

An encouraging aspect of the business was the way teachers not on the committee kept coming up and speaking about it. The Head of Biology borrowed the latest issue of *English in Education* (9.2) to study the transcript of the Biology lesson (pp. 52–8), and the Head of History showed me two pieces on the way of life of North American Indians written by children of putative low ability. It's interesting that the teacher concerned commended them for their unusual length from these children, and for the extent to which the children were involved, although I'm not sure there's a lot of expressive language: I suspect that they had learned to 'do' Indians or 'do' days-in-the-life-of, or something, just as the top O-level streams are learning to 'do' the Stuarts.

Later the Head of Biology borrowed a cassette recorder and recorded some lessons; so did I and a History teacher. I already have a fair amount of teacher–pupil talk on tape, but for everyone else it's a whole new idea.

At the end of this meeting I was a bit worried when the Deputy indicated that he saw the committee's work as a sort of 'awareness purge', a bit like the periodic purges on smoking in the bogs. However, subsequent events lead me to think that he was just passing through a necessary transitional phase.

There was a long break before our next meeting, ostensibly to allow for the collection of material, and really because of work pressure and the mock exams, marking and reports; but we met again at the end of January to plan our first open event, a Staff Seminar, which took place on 12th February 1976, almost the anniversary of Bullock. The meeting was fixed for 4.20 pm, ten minutes after school finished, and was, of course, voluntary. Twenty-two people attended, including the Headmaster, but some of the younger staff stayed away because they had been offended by receiving notes from the Head asking them to explain their absence from Assembly that morning. However, it's difficult to see how such a seminar could have been much use if more had attended. The meeting lasted precisely one hour, and after a brief introduction from me (more Steve McQueen than Brando this time, but still not Cary Grant), discussion revolved around two of the three duplicated papers

attached: we never got on to open/closed questions. Discussion was quite lively, at least a dozen people spoke, we even managed to avoid getting bogged down in spelling. I won't go into the discussion in detail, partly because it was a bit diffuse at times, but mainly because I recorded the whole thing, and hope to make an edited transcript soon. I outlined the next items in the programme: two more seminars between now and Whitsun, one on talk, and the other on writing. I hope that later meetings will enable us to look in more detail at textbooks, with the suggestion that certain criteria ought to be followed when making a choice; and, even more important, to consider the production of written and other source material by departments – some of the Units currently being produced by, for instance, the History Department, are depressingly like some of the less inspiring textbooks.

As part of the preparatory work for the talk and writing meetings, I announced that I would be badgering people individually to record their lessons (the PE Dept. looked amazed and horrified) and to provide examples of children's writing, with notes on the conditions under which it was produced.

A few comments:

You have to walk delicately. When I hinted that learning in Science might be more effective if the excitement of discovery and exploration could be fostered and maintained, the Head of Science replied: 'But Science *isn't* exciting; Science is *dull*. It's our job to take any excitement out of it. We don't *want* people getting all excited about it.'

The Head of Craft said much the same thing about his own subject. His comment on *Gnat Killers*: 'This wouldn't do for us – it's just the sort of thing we *don't* want.' But he's mellowing a bit.

A great deal of work is likely to fall upon the Head of the English Department in implementing such a scheme – try at least to get secretarial assistance, which is something not normally available to staff in our school.

There was a strong feeling of the blind leading the blind to begin with. None of us knew where to start; and my main worry was that too definite a lead might produce a strong rejection by influential members of staff, hence the mumbling and shuffling.

Language policy – first steps
The report by the same Head of English to his colleagues after their first 'language across the curriculum' meeting:

I thought the seminar on Thursday 12th February was generally successful: turnout of twenty-two represents nearly a third of the staff for a voluntary meeting; there was plenty of discussion; a number of ideas that were clearly new to many people were introduced without any noticeable acrimony; we didn't get bogged down on, say, spelling, to the detriment of more general issues; and it's difficult to see how such a meeting could work at all with a much larger group. On the debit side, I think our publicity could have been better, but see the last point above; and perhaps a brief written outline might have helped, despite the tendency *not* to read documents.

The work done so far has certainly crystallized much that was nebulous and hazy for me: when we began I couldn't see my way through it all. A programme for further work, even in some detail, is beginning to suggest itself, and I have jotted down the following points for guidance (mainly my own).

1 It has become clear that if this work is to be at all valuable the exercise can't be regarded as a one-off or periodic purge like smoking in the bogs.
2 Much remains to be done in the areas we have already begun to discuss. The seminar last Thursday only scratched the surface of even the limited fields we worked in.
3 It is obviously desirable (essential?) to involve *all* staff, but a seminar-style meeting of seventy-two would be not merely unwieldy but actually impossible. Therefore we have to find other organizational methods to bring everyone in.
4 Two main areas for further work seem to me to be *talk* and *writing*:
Talk – the extent to which it is used as medium of learning, how, what kind, how much, how often, etc. Question techniques would be a subsection of this area.
Writing – kinds of writing pupils are expected to produce: transactional, expressive, poetic, and transitional in either direction; see English Department syllabus Section A3 for summary.
5 I would like to propose, therefore, two half-day (afternoon) conferences, on each of the above areas, between now and Christmas '76. Precise details would have to be worked out, but there could be

preparatory work shared by all departments (collection, editing and duplication of examples of writing; tape recordings and short transcripts; critiques of textbooks; samples of worksheets) and I could probably call on agencies outside the school to assist in various ways.

6 I would suggest that it would be a good idea, in order to keep our ambitions within reasonable bounds, to limit ourselves to study of the first three Years to begin with. Even concentrating on the First Year could have far-reaching effects, hopefully beneficial.

7 I am very anxious that this should not seem like, or indeed *be*, a case of the English Department telling other departments what they ought to be doing. Part of my job, and that of other members of the working party, will therefore be to see staff individually and talk with them, and to look for and encourage initiative and suggestions from other departments.

8 It is very easy to see where Maths, History and Science can be involved in this work. It is less easy to see the effects on say, Art, and very difficult to see where PE will fit in. It may be that we shall decide that some areas are outside our brief or scope, but I suspect that experience will reveal needs everywhere.

9 Ultimately, I see the emergence of some sort of 'policy' about use of language, methods of using talk for learning, department and inter-department discussion about preparation of written teaching material and choice of books, and so on. However, this part of the programme is still veiled in mist. What is clear is that we cannot expect instant miracles: this is a very long-term project; but I am happy that we are working on what seem to be the right lines.

10 I should hate any of the foregoing to be interpreted as empire-building!

A language policy in action

We are often asked if we know of any schools that are implementing a language policy across the curriculum. We illustrate from Westerhope Middle School in Durham. We think it highly significant that we were not, in the first instance, given a language policy document. We were given a 'Statement of Intent' which set down in three pages the objectives of the school and the agencies by which those objectives might be

carried out. This 'Statement of Intent' had been produced from many discussions between the headmaster and 'teaching staff who were to be the nucleus of a larger and changing staff of the new Middle School'. A rider was added that if any teacher having joined the staff was unable to accept the underlying educational philosophy of the 'statement', he should discuss this with the headmaster so that 'an acceptable solution to the dilemma' could be found. Accompanying this Statement of Intent was the following document headed 'The language policy of a school.'

The language policy of a school

We hope that the videotape recording will illustrate as many of the following points as possible

1 That a non-stressful but secure atmosphere has been created which should encourage children to talk.
2 That the child is actively encouraged to talk at school.
3 That the child is given the experience of talking to teachers – individually – in small groups – in discussions etc.
4 That the child still has stories read to him.
5 That he is given the opportunity to make effective use of a library.
6 That he is given the freedom to talk to his peers when working in small groups and that classroom furniture is so arranged to facilitate this activity.
7 That the child is helped to use reading and writing to gain knowledge, understanding, pleasure, satisfaction, discrimination, a sense of values, control over inner feelings and enlargement of sympathy.
8 That he is helped to understand the different ways written language is used according to its purpose and context.
9 That he is given advice on books for his own reading.
10 That he is helped to become more competent socially through learning how to express himself.
11 That every child is given ample scope to achieve success at the things he/she does best and so acquire a good self image and the confidence to talk in appropriate situations.

With the language policy document went a videotape of a mixed-ability class aged twelve to thirteen recorded throughout three days and covering all the activities that this class engaged in, all lessons including drama, PE, craft and library, and occasions such as Assembly, school dinner and playtime.

Clearly such a way of producing a visual language policy involved all the staff, disposed of the notorious gap between statements of objectives and actual practice, opened all that was going on to public discussion, and located the language policy firmly in the more general aims of the school. Equally clearly, discussion, planning and working to agreed objectives must have gone on for a long time for a language policy to be envisaged so clearly as part of the school's aims.

Who can help?

The Bullock Report asks something new and difficult of teachers – not only that they should each as individuals foster children's reading and writing, but that they should *collectively* organize language policies for their schools. This is proving particularly difficult in secondary schools because these are mostly organized in subject departments with nearly every teacher a subject specialist. Within this structure the English teachers are seen as being the language specialists. Many subject teachers feel that their concern is with teaching their subjects and do not see language as having much to do with this. Others, however, see children's language development as an important instrument in learning History, Science, Geography, etc.

Taking any kind of collective action is a very different kind of activity from taking individual action in one's own lessons. From our work with teachers over the last six months we have set out the following suggestions about who can help in getting some of the recommendations of the Report alive and active in schools.

Inside school

1 *The Head*

As the person directly responsible for the administration of the school, the Head is very important to the success or failure of any innovation. The Head can provide help – as we have seen earlier – by:

(a) supporting teachers in their purpose by taking an interest in it and by making it clear to all the staff that he/she is interested and supportive

(b) allowing, even encouraging, opportunities for the teachers involved to inform their colleagues about what they want to do
(c) being willing to explain the work to parents, governors and other interested people.

2 *Senior staff*
Deputy Heads, Heads of Departments, Curriculum Coordinator – if there is one – are important in the same way as the Head is, and without the help of the senior staff it will be difficult to get a language policy really working.

3 *The pupils*
It will generally be desirable to talk to pupils about any experimental scheme. Ideally there ought to be some facility for children to participate in a critical way about the courses they are following and the problems as they see them. We have found the children acutely aware of language and its problems and transcripts of their discussions or their writing on these topics can provide good starting points for teachers' consideration of these same problems (the difficulty of 'book' language, for instance).

Outside school

1 *Local Education Officers*
The Chief Education Officer and other members of his staff, the secondary, primary and subject advisers or inspectors are responsible for all the administration of the area in the same way that Heads are responsible for schools, and their influence is therefore very wide. They offer a great deal of support to teachers in the form of short-term or long-term inservice education and very varied kinds of assistance. In addition, some authorities have an officer specially responsible for inservice work with teachers, and he/she often works in conjunction with a University Institute of Education. Many of the starting points described in the previous sections of this Pack were initiated by, or in conjunction with, such local education officers. They will organize meetings or courses and, where possible, duplicate and circulate material for discussion. Some authorities, for instance, have made their own summaries of sections of the Bullock Report and have circulated these to schools; they have also, in cooperation with Heads, arranged joint meetings between local schools and follow-up activities of various kinds.

2 *Teachers' Centres*

Teachers' Centres are, of course, the responsibility of the local education authority, and the scope of their activities varies a great deal. At best, the Teachers' Centre Warden would be the first person to approach for help in getting a meeting outside school organized, and the facilities of the centre should be available for any discussion material needed.

3 *Parents*

Most parents are keenly interested in their children's progress but they often have very vague ideas about what goes in on schools. We had a report of a meeting in one school where the English department had approached the Parent Teacher Association and arranged for one of the education meetings to be on the Bullock Report. Most parents have little opportunity to discuss educational matters, and PTA meetings would seem to offer an opportunity of getting a wider understanding of the aims of the Report.

4 *Subject Associations* (the Association for Science Education, the National Association for the Teaching of English, for instance)

If subject associations could be persuaded to see the Bullock Report as one of their concerns they could be more influential than any small group within a school. It is perhaps worth noting that *Mathematics Teaching*, the journal of the Association of Teachers of Mathematics, carried a long editorial on the importance of language in learning mathematics; and the National Association for the Teaching of English through its annual conference, branch meetings and publications has actively campaigned. These activities must have reached many more teachers than could be reached by a school or Teachers' Centre meeting.

5 *The Schools Council Project 'Writing Across the Curriculum'*

The Project team of three with a fair number of teachers working with it has provided discussion pamphlets, Packs of 'outcomes' from schools, lists of relevant books and a book of outcomes from the Project (*Writing and Learning Across the Curriculum 11–16* Ward Lock Educational (1976) £1.35). The Project has now ended but information about publications can be obtained from Ward Lock Educational Limited, 116 Baker Street, London W1M 2BB.

Reference

BARNES, D., BRITTON, J. and ROSEN, H. (1971) (revised edition) *Language, the Learner and the School* Penguin

2 Key issues from the Bullock Report

Language and thinking

Talking

> In group discussion the spoken contribution of each member may be worked upon by speaker and listeners alike, and in the immediacy of face-to-face speech they make corporate enquiry a powerful mode of learning. (Bullock Report, Chapter 4, p. 50)
>
> The statement we have made becomes an object of our own contemplation and a spur to further thinking. (Bullock Report, Chapter 4, p. 49)

'It seems a good way to teach'

Keith Harvey is a probationary Physics teacher. One of the Project team tape recorded a group of children working together during one of his lessons. The pupils had previously done some worksheets on ways of measuring time. For this lesson they had been asked to bring a candle or jars and tins (which could be fixed together to make sand or water timers). Some of the pupils had had difficulty in deciding how to measure the amount of their candles burned in a given time but it was clear that different candles had produced different results. This is a short extract from the end of the transcript.

Julie:	Sir . . . Mr H. You wouldn't be able to make a reliable candle clock.
Teacher:	Why?
Julie:	'Cos both our candles burnt down different times. It depends on the candle.
Girl:	Unless you buy the same candle.
Julie:	Because her candle burnt slower than our candle.
Teacher:	There's all sorts of things (*indecipherable*).

Julie: And the wind . . .
Teacher: And the wind, yeh.
Girl: Like the candles you put in candelabra last longer than these ones.
Teacher: Well, they're different thicknesses, aren't they?
Boy: No they're not, they're posher.
Teacher: What, they're made out of something else?
Girl: And then twisted . . .
That's what I mean . . .
Voices: Yeh, those twisted ones . . .
Burning slower . . .
Girl: Yeh, because when we had a power cut two weeks ago we had a candle like that and one of them fancy ones in a candelabra. And the candelabra lasted longer than that one.
Julie: So it depends on the candle.
Boy: Those twisted ones do burn slower.
Teacher: I can't see why.
Boy: 'Cos it has to go round the bend.
(*laughter*)
Girl: It's a different wax, I suppose.

During the lesson there was a great deal of talk about the details of measuring and the variables that influenced their results. Now, with the teacher, these pupils are reflecting on the implications of what they have been doing – and are bringing experiences from outside the lesson to bear too.

Some time later we asked Keith Harvey about this lesson.

BN: When you looked at this transcript, did you feel that there were helpful things going on in the talk in addition to the activity they were doing?

KH: Oh yes, yes. I think that's one of the reasons I like practicals. I think you can get a lot more – not what you expect – but you get a lot more from the children. It seems to be a good way to teach children to think for themselves.

. . . I think the learning itself is far more diverse than simply having an objective. The objective here is connected with the idea of time and yet I'm sure they learned far more about candles – and general principles of exactly what they're doing. They're out on a limb – they haven't been told what to do.

Julie and Catherine, two of the pupils who were engaged in this activity also talked to one of the Project team about the lesson:

Julie: . . . I don't like working on my own. I like to talk to people about what I'm doing.

Catherine: So do I.

Julie: 'Cos if I work on my own it makes me feel like an exam and I don't do no good in exams – 'cos it's too quiet. . . . Lots of people don't do well in exams 'cos they just forget everything – I do. Soon as I walk in there and know that I've got to do an exam I can't remember anything.

Catherine: Can't stand the quiet in exams either. Like, if we had to do practical work and we had to do it on our own or say, in pairs, and we had to be quiet while we was doing it, I wouldn't be able to do it – even if I knew what I had to do.

Julie: We had to think a lot about what we were doing and try to find out for ourselves – like how to measure the wick.

BN: Do you think talk is that valuable that you'd like to have more of it?

Catherine: Well, if you don't understand something then it's best to talk it out. It's like talking out arguments, disagreements, you know. If you talk about them at the end something's normally all sorted out.

'An object of our own contemplation'

John Blanchard, a teacher at Knottingley High School in Yorkshire, sent us a transcript of a discussion with his Lower Sixth class. First he taped a discussion in which he asked their advice about a tape-recording experiment which he intended to do with a fourth-year class. He then transcribed part of this discussion and presented the transcripts to the class at a lesson the following day. What follows after John Blanchard's introduction is a part of the discussion of the transcript which the students had in front of them.

We think this is a very interesting tape. It's a shock to these students to see their written-down speech and this shock, after the first numbing effect has worn off, seems to be a powerful stimulus for discussion about language. The students are using language collaboratively to learn about language – to become more aware of the assumptions they make

about talking and writing and having those assumptions tested or challenged. Look, for instance, at the main contributions which Wanda makes:

> It (the transcript) don't read, don't read how you'd pronounce it anyway.
>
> Everybody speaks different to what they write.
>
> You're still yourself when you're writing – everybody has a different style of writing, don't they? I mean it's, it i'n't any harder to write than it is to speak – you, you still –
>
> No, there's no difference between speaking and writing 'cos you're only using vocabulary, aren't yer?
>
> Everybody's different, there's no differ–, there's no difference in what I write an' what I speak, only pronunciation, really. Only I write correct, I write, I write it proper when I write it down; I don't speak it proper – everybody talks different to what they write, don't they?
>
> We abbreviate words when we talk but you don't when you write, do you?
>
> You've got to complete the sentence for anyone who's reading it to be able to understand it.
>
> (Referring to transcript) 'Cos you say – when you were talking you said it were about 'this lot'; if you were writing you'd have to say it wor about 'sending children off'.
>
> You can't write down exactly – you can write down exactly what you say, but you can't write down exactly *how* you say it.

At first Wanda sees the only difference between talking and writing as 'pronunciation' but, although she holds on to this distinction throughout, she begins to become aware that there is more to it. She recognizes that the context for talk can provide a large part of its meaning, that abbreviations and incomplete sentences will often not make sense when written but are clear when spoken in context. She also seems to be becoming aware that intonation can be a significant part of the meaning in spoken language ('you can write down exactly what you say, but you can't write down exactly *how* you say it').

There seems to be a pivotal utterance from Wanda in which she recognizes the limitations of *her* view of the differences between talking and writing:

. . . there's no difference in what I write an' what I speak, only pronunciation, really. Only I write correct, I write, I write it proper when I write it down; I don't speak it proper – everybody talks different to what they write, don't they?

From this point on, Wanda contributes examples of how speech and writing differ.

We would suggest that Wanda's initial view begins to be modified because she has to acknowledge the validity of other views which she hears and we see her struggling to accommodate them. (Part of her difficulty seems to be that she uses 'pronunciation' to mean accent, intonation and abbreviation – and there is a hint that by the end she is beginning to sort this out.)

The value of an activity like this is that it enables some kind of 'collaborative' learning to take place. In terms of this particular discussion, the students are focusing their attention on language, becoming more aware of the conventions and requirements of both written and spoken language and the way they relate to each other. This awareness is coming through the mutual exploration of the issues – and not by a teacher 'correcting' work which the students have done.

Transcript of discussion

The following is a transcript of the major and central part of a conversation which took place on the afternoon of 18th April 1975. We are in a hot, office-type room, desks, or rather tables, and chairs cramming the room laterally, curtains drawn to exclude the sunlight, heaters unalterably on full blast.

Lesson: CEE English. The Upper Sixth students have completed one year and two terms of their two-year course; the Lower Sixth two terms of their one-year course. The previous teacher left at Easter; this is the first week that I have taught this group.

The cassette tape recorder is on the teacher's desk at the front. The microphone lead stretches between Colin and Neville (Lower Sixth), who sit at the front table, and rests on a chair in the middle of the room. Overlooking that chair, left to right, are Denise and Joan (Lower Sixth), Wanda (Upper Sixth), Denise (Upper Sixth – the Denise who talks during this conversation), Beverley (Upper Sixth), and across the table

from Beverley, towards the front of the room, and like Beverley with her side against the wall, Susan (Lower Sixth). For the duration of the conversation, the teacher, myself, stands leaning against the wall in front of Susan.

The events preceding this transcript were as follows. I handed out the earlier transcripts, inviting the students to read them, and said I would later look at their CEE work. The students began to read; three or four didn't seem to finish reading the whole transcript. There was some surprise at reading their own names in print (Colin: 'Hey up, "Colin" – I've heard of him!' etc.). I was corrected about my introduction to the first transcript – Joan hadn't been there, etc. Long reading silence. Joan asks what it is all for. I reply that I am interested in finding out how much pupils/students think they can learn from talking. There is some talk about who knew the tape had been on. Long pauses and hesitance or reluctance to answer my questions: 'What do you think about seeing your spoken words in writing?' etc. Beverley says, 'I don't talk like that, do I?' and that the transcript is very life-like: 'I can just picture it'. Pause . . .

Teacher: Um, one thing I'd like to ask you, and it's the last thing. Er, what is the main difference between the writing that you've got here, which is the writing of your speech – what's the difference between that and normal English that you'd write in your folders?

Joan: 's not English.

Teacher: Which isn't English?

Joan: (*laughs*)

Teacher: This (*pointing at the transcript*) isn't English? I think I know what you mean – what do you mean?

Wanda: (*almost inaudibly*) It don't read, don't read how you'd pronounce it anyway.

Teacher: It hasn't got the dialect and things like that in, has it? But what do you mean, Joan, by 'It's not English'?

Joan: Well, you wouldn't (*indecipherable*) English.

Teacher: You wouldn't write like this?

Joan: No.

Teacher: Why? What would you write? What's the difference?

Joan: It's – the grammar i'n't right.

Teacher: Can you – yeah, think about it; is there anything ungrammatical here? (*four seconds pause*) I think there is one thing

that's ungrammatical that I spotted, that's all. See if you can find – more! (*three seconds pause*) When Wanda says in the middle of the first page, 'Because if you put us in there we'd know it *were* on', when in fact you'd say 'it wor', wouldn't you – that's the only ungrammatical bit that's in there. ['wor' – a Yorkshire spoken version of 'was'] Unless you can prove me wrong. (*chuckle*) So it's not the grammar exactly. (*twenty-four seconds pause*) I think I'm going to leave you with that problem. If anyone can decide –

Beverley: When – this is like we, really, are, i'n't it? (*undertone*) 's, um, hard to explain really. This is us what's on this tape, but it's *not* when we write, you know, we . . .

Teacher: Ah.

Beverley: . . . we, we're picking ourselves out all the time when we write, but this is how we are normally.

Teacher: Ah yeah, I know what you mean; that's I think what, what Joan meant in a way. Joan was describing the language, but you're describing the person, but you're making the same point, I think.

Beverley: Yeah.

Teacher: (*slowly*) So this is you, the way you are –

Beverley: Yeah.

Teacher: But writing, isn't quite you. And you said because you're always picking yourselves out; now what, what exactly is that?

Beverley: Well, I mean – er, you know, we wouldn't put 'thee', 'thou', 'that' down on paper, would we?

Teacher: No.

Beverley: (*slowly, thoughtfully*) We, make, we'd, we wouldn't write that down, we'd have to find another form of –

Teacher: Yeah.

Beverley: More or less.

Teacher: Yeah.

Beverley: This is what I mean.

Denise: Well, it's like when Wanda says . . .

Beverley: It's down on paper.

Denise: . . . 'We wouldn't dare say owt', we wouldn't write . . .

Teacher: Oh no.

Denise: . . . 'owt', I mean we wouldn't write that down on – when we're writing properly.

Teacher: You mean you'd have to say, 'We wouldn't say anything',

wouldn't you, you'd have to write it like that. That's dialect really, or accent. (*very slowly*) So do you think that you find writing more difficult than speaking? (*three seconds pause*)

Beverley: Yeah.

Teacher: Is it?

Susan: Yeah. (*laughter*)

Joan: She spoke! (*less laughter*)

Teacher: Right. (*slowly*) Because you have to make an effort to put your thoughts into a certain *form* when you're writing.

Girls: (*quietly*) Yeah.

Wanda: (*quietly*) You don't have to make an effort.

Teacher: *You* don't have to make an effort?

Wanda: (*very quietly*) No.

Teacher: It just comes naturally. But you're still changing yourself; is that – do you agree with Beverley on this? I mean, I don't know –

Girl: Yeah.

Beverley: Well, you are 'cos you can't write (*indecipherable*) English.

Wanda: Everybody speaks different to what they write.

Teacher: Yeah, we're trying – Beverley's trying to *explain why*, and she says it's because when you're talking you just are yourself, but when you're writing you've got to, kind of put it in a certain form.

Wanda: You're still yourself when you're writing – everybody has a different style of writing, don't they? I mean it's, it i'n't any harder to write than it is to speak – you, you still –

Joan: Aye, but if you write down how you –

Denise: (*slowly*) I couldn't write down how I talk, I mean –

Joan: You can't, you can't, can yer?

Denise: If I talk like this I couldn't write that down, I'd write it down sort o' proper English.

Teacher: (*quietly*) Mm. Well, that's kind of what Wanda's saying, you know, that it comes natural in fact, that you don't have to make any grinding effort –

Wanda: No, there's no difference . . .

Susan: Ah.

Wanda: . . . between speaking and writing 'cos you're only using vocabulary, aren't yer?

Susan: Well – but you've *learnt* 'ow to do it, when you were little y—, you, you probably spelt cat with a 'k' or summat like that, wouldn't yer, because –

Teacher: Ah, that's a very good point I think; that, er, you weren't aware of learning how to speak, you just learnt how to speak.

Joan: You speak like you hear other people though.

Teacher: Ah yeah. Do you *write* like you *read* other people?

Wanda: } No, you write your own.
Girl: } Everybody, everybody writes their own.

Teacher: They have their own style of writing. Mmm. (*three seconds pause*) But Wanda, you just said there's no difference between writing and speech (*short mumble, from Wanda?*). But there *is*. (*laughter*)

Susan: A lot! (*giggles; five seconds pause*)

Joan: It's all t'same, it's just that, that's your *kind* o' talking.

Girls: Mmm – er – (*Pause. It sounds on the tape as though someone was saying, 'It's quiet'.*)

Wanda: Everybody's different, there's no differ—, there's no difference in what I write an' what I speak, only pronunciation (*short mumble*), really. (*very quietly*) Only I write correct, I write, I write it proper when I write it down; I don't speak it proper – everybody talks different to what they write, don't they?

Teacher: (*quietly*) Ar right, so –

Joan: Back where you start? (*laughing*)

Teacher: You, you reckon you are saying you tidy it up a bit when you are writing; because you wouldn't write, would you, 'Because if you put us in there we'd know it were on' –

Wanda: We abbreviate words when we talk but you don't when you write, do you?

Teacher: Yeah, not only do you abbreviate thoughts, I think you abbreviate ideas. There's a little bit here, right at the beginning, where I say – that – at the beginning, then Wanda says, 'Just turn the machine on and send them in and not let them know it's there, get all sorts then.' I say, 'Do you think?' and someone came in, 'Much easier'. Well in Eng—, when you're writing –

Joan: You can't do that.

Teacher: You'd have to say it would be much easier to something something something. But in speech you abbreviate – dead right, you abbreviate, you just say, 'Much easier'. Y'know what you mean then. (*three seconds pause*)

Wanda: You've got to complete the sentence for anyone who's reading it to be able to understand it.

Joan: Yeah, but you understand that 'cos you were there – *I* don't (*sighing and laughing*). (*three seconds pause*)

Teacher: But, are you saying, Joan, you didn't understand this to begin with?

Joan: Well, not at first; by t'time I got t' middle I realized you di'n't – they di'n't know it was on!

Teacher: Can you find a way of describing this *very* accurately? (*slowly*) Why were *we* able to understand each other while we were talking, and now I've written down what we were saying – and Joan, who wasn't there, *reading* about it, *couldn't* understand? Why? Why could we understand each other, with abbreviations, jumbled up words –

Wanda: 'Cos we remember –

Denise: 'Cos we had the tape there.

Girls: Yeah.

Teacher: No, but I mean at the time – when we were there; why could *we* understand what we were saying, but an outsider couldn't? (*three seconds pause*) (*undertone*) Bit of a funny question, i'n't it?

Susan: (*knowingly*) I know. She's a Geordie (*i.e. Joan*). (*laughter*)

Joan: Geordies've got nowt to do with it. (*three seconds pause*)

Teacher: I think it's that – it's what you've said already really, I suppose, that when you're writing, you have to make things clear –

Susan: Hey up! Is that on now?

Beverley: It is, yeah.

Teacher: Yeah. (*Laughter. Exclamations of 'Oh no!'*) When you're writing you have to make things clear, but when you're speaking you can kind of leave things kind of unsaid.

Joan: Ah, well – like she just said. She says, 'Is that on now?' Now say I hadn't been there, now I'd 'a' thought is *what* on . . .

Teacher: Yeah.

Joan: . . . 'cos I wouldn't 'a' known.

Teacher: Yes, right – Joan's really on the ball! So in speech she can say, 'Is that on?' but in writing . . .

Susan: She can't.

Denise: (*quietly*) She has to say, 'Is t'tape-recorder on?'

Teacher: . . . you'd have to say, er, 'Jack said to George, "Is the tape recorder playing now?" '

Joan: Yeah, so that t'reader knew what you were on about.

55

Teacher: Yeah, yeah.
Joan: If I read a book like that, I'd not know what it wor from t'beginning to end.
Teacher: Unless you got into it, an' I think you did get into it a bit; you can begin to guess for yourself –
Joan: Well, I more or less had an idea, 'cos I phoned 'er (*Susan*) last night an' she were on about it – a *recorder* – but I di'n't get *all* t'story.

Teacher: So what do we use in speech that we can't use in writing?
Joan: Abbreviations.
Teacher: Abbreviations. Anything else? (*four seconds pause*)
Neville: Expressions.
Teacher: Expressions – what do you mean, 'expressions'? On your face?
Neville: Yer face and hands.
Joan: (*indecipherable*)
Beverley: No, you've got objects.
Teacher: Hands as well. Neville's right, of course.
Wanda: } You might have, you might have the object there you're talking about.
Teacher: } Susan went, 'What did you put that for?' (*pointing*)
Joan: Susan talks with 'er 'ands.
Teacher: Yeah, so do I.
Susan: I can't help it.
Joan: A lot o' people'd be done without their hands. She does (*laughter*) she does all the time, you can't see when they move (*?*).
Susan: Ah, but only (*gesticulating*) – oh, I'm off again! (*laughter*)
Joan: She does it in our 'ouse an' me dad gets on at 'er for it; so she sits like this (*arms behind back*). (*laughter*)
Teacher: Why, I don't think we need to get at people; you s—, it's – When you're talking you use what you can; that might be your hands, face, objects – cups and saucers to throw at people (*laughter*) – all sorts o' things; but when you're writing you can't do that, can you?
Wanda: (*referring to the transcript*) 'Cos you say – when you were talking you said it were about 'this lot'; if you were writing you'd have to say it wor about 'sending children off'.
Teacher: Yeah, yeah. (*eight seconds pause*)
Wanda: You can't write down exactly – you can write down exactly

what you say, but you can't write down eaxctly *how* you say it.

Teacher: I think we've, er, hit on some important points here.

Writing

> In the practice of writing the child, left alone with his evolving utterance, is engaged in *generating knowledge* (our italics) for himself. (Bullock Report, Chapter 4, p. 50)

> Expressive language is 'close to the speaker. It relies upon a reader's interest in the writer as well as what he has to say. Because of these qualities it has great educational importance, since it provides the tentative stage through which a pupil's new thinking must pass on its way to the comparative certainty of knowledge.' (Bullock Report, Chapter 11, p. 165)

'Whose language?'

A cautionary tale based on a conversation between Pat D'Arcy and Nobby Martin.

Nobby was studying A-level English and History in the Lower Sixth. He was acutely aware that he wasn't putting things in his essays the way his teachers wanted him to put them, but this didn't mean that he had no ideas in his head about the books he was studying. The problem was how to find an acceptable form for them which reflected what he had to say *and* which received the approval of his teacher–readers.

Here are some of the comments that Nobby made about the problem of 'whose language?'

> In the Lower Sixth it's your essays – it's your style that's got to be like, er – you've got to change it to their ways for them to understand it.
>
> I *understood* it all, it's just my way of expressing it – I couldn't express myself, not in the way they told us to express it.
>
> You can make notes in your own way, except when you come to an exam – you've got to look at it and you've got to change it. If there was someone who could understand how I wrote and he was an

examiner, then I'd like it much better. I think it's a job communicating between the student and the examiner because he's thinking in his own terms of English and style and not anyone else's.

Nobby uses the word 'style' several times to mean a way of expressing what you think *that is acceptable to teachers:*

I start an essay or something and I think, 'I've gone wrong here' and I have to start again – I'm always thinking of writing in their style . . . You're thinking so much of writing in their style that you're not really thinking what you're writing about.

When Nobby was asked to explain what he meant by style he said:

Nobby: I suppose it's writing that's got to be accepted – well, not using slang, is it? Words have got to have a more explicit meaning than – just usual words. It's the simplest way of expressing something that can be easily understood, I suppose.
PD: But you're saying it's a very difficult way.
Nobby: It is a very difficult way.

We believe that many teachers require students to focus on the way the medium is being handled first and on what it is being used for second. If this is the case it means that the writer's main energies are being channelled into 'how' – into the *use* of the net; what is being caught in it has therefore to be glimpsed out of the corner of the eye.

We would like to quote what Michael Polanyi, in his book *Personal Knowledge*, has said about the confusions that can occur when the roles of focal awareness and subsidiary awareness are shifted in this way:

Subsidiary awareness and focal awareness are mutually exclusive. If a pianist shifts his attention from the piece he is playing to the observation of what he is doing with his fingers while playing it, he gets confused and may have to stop. . . .

The kind of clumsiness which is due to the fact that focal attention is directed to the subsidiary elements of an action is commonly known as self-consciousness. A serious and sometimes incurable form of it is stage fright, which seems to consist in the anxious riveting of one's attention on the next word – or note or gesture – that one has to find

or remember. This destroys one's sense of the context which alone can smoothly evoke the proper sequence of words, notes or gestures.

Perhaps something of the kind is happening to Nobby as he tries to find 'the style' his teacher wants.

If we are going to offer more viable modes of learning to boys and girls like Nobby, we have to look for ways of using language which are different from those currently used for examination purposes. Talking or writing *to discover* what you know is more important in many ways than talking or writing *to show* what you know.

It's not that he couldn't care less whether other people understand him or not – he has a keen sense of audience and cares very much:

PD: Did you feel it would be more valuable to you if you were allowed to do it in your own way and put it down as it came out?

Nobby: Well, more valuable to me, but not to anyone else, I don't think, because if I put it down in my way nobody would understand it.

And later, talking about the poems that he sometimes writes at home:

PD: Do you ever show them to anybody?

Nobby: No, I usually rip them up.

PD: So that when you're writing them you're conscious that you're writing for yourself . . .

Nobby: Yeah.

PD: . . . and not for anybody else – does that make it easier?

Nobby: Yeah.

PD: Because at least you can understand yourself so there's no problem about having to get it right for somebody else.

Nobby: It's not what I'd like to do; I'd like to write in a nice style so that everybody could understand it, but I can't find that possible.

The trouble with Nobby and others like him is that their confidence has been undermined. If their teachers appear not to have understood what they have written, then they think they have written badly. On the

other hand, if they can't understand what their teachers or their textbooks say, then again they think *they* are at fault:

Nobby: . . . if it's contrary to what the book says, then you think you're wrong. I don't know why, but you do – you tend to think of the critics as always being right. I always think of the teacher as always being right.

PD: But you don't really believe that the teacher is always right?

Nobby: No, this isn't the case, but you think because they're a teacher they've got their English and they're bound to be right.

Later on in the tape, he ascribes the difficulties that teachers have in understanding their pupils to their training:

Nobby: I think it's hard for a teacher to communicate with a student because they've been to college and teachers' training college and they've been taught in such a way that – they haven't been taught like the student, you know – they haven't learnt to speak like the student – they speak a different language – the way they actually say things, communicate, it's different.

PD: Well, tell me what you find difficult about the way I've been trying to get across to you what I'm interested in.

Nobby: The words you say are so precise in meaning; I don't understand every word you say – pick it all up and understand it. I mean if I was talking to you sometimes it wouldn't mean anything at all.

PD: I think that would be very unlikely.

Nobby: Yeah, but you're influenced when you go to college to talk in a different style – more precise language I suppose. I mean when you're out in the street you talk all different; when you go into a classroom and start talking to a teacher, you start thinking about what you've got to say to them.

PD: Don't you ever do that when you get involved in a discussion with your own mates?

Nobby: No, I don't think so. When you talk to your mates, what you think and that comes straight into your head to express what you say. When you're talking to a teacher, you're thinking in his style as well – what he's going to say.

PD: So you're saying that this even happens when you're talking to a teacher.

Nobby: Yes.

We know that teachers don't undermine children's confidence intentionally. But the constant emphasis given to 'precision' and to a logical organization of 'the facts' can have a paralysing effect on children's thinking. It may be that the 'stage fright' which Polanyi suggests can come from paying too much attention to the medium distracts children's thoughts when they try to express themselves in writing.

At another point Nobby says of students who get better marks than he does:

> I think I've got the same ideas as them – I might have more; a person can be, well, in the lower forms (*streams?*) in the school and he can know more about life than anybody else – because he's actually living in it, isn't he – experiences it more.

But the possibility of communicating that experience in his own way seems to Nobby to be remote – in talking or in writing. It seems to be the sense that the teacher is the expert – and infinitely better than he is at formulating what he knows – that is so discouraging:

> I suppose you think them to be more intelligent, so you try and, you know, catch up with them I suppose – try and be equal – and you know it's not possible so you don't want to say anything.

When we asked Nobby if he would write something for us in his own way he replied:

> I wouldn't think that was possible now after studying the texts that I have studied, because I've been influenced by the other teachers – they've influenced me, I don't think I could think for myself.

And this in spite of the fact that he has already described how his English teacher that very day has been exhorting them to do some independent thinking:

> It's different now in the Lower Sixth. At least the teachers try to make you think for yourself, because Mr P— told us today, he said, er, 'You mustn't keep writing down everything I say, because something I say might be rubbish – you've got to think for yourself'.

But the accumulated effect of remarks such as these on much of the

writing that is handed in carries a more powerful message than a teacher's spoken advice:

> Far too many elementary mistakes in style and grammar and handwriting too! You make a shaky start failing to establish what 'term-agent' means.
>
> Your essay improves as it goes on but you still need to work very hard to get to grips with these extremely difficult texts.
>
> Your style lacks care.

The message that Nobby picked up all too clearly was that the really important thing was *how* he wrote – his ideas were only secondary to this.

What we need to look for as teachers if we are concerned with the *process* of learning is new strategies which make it more possible for our students to think for themselves. Perhaps we should look for ways of using talking and writing which value thoughts that are still at the stage of being disorganized and incoherent because that is where we and the students can start. For instance, an American researcher Alan Purves in an unpublished paper asked his students after they had read a poem to write down freely whatever came into their minds about it immediately afterwards – then to read it again and to write down what thoughts came after a second reading – and a third and a fourth and so on.

We are often in too much of a hurry to move our pupils on to the 'end game', to that stage in the learning process where all the connections have been made, the generalizations formulated and the details arranged neatly inside a defined framework so that the teachers can see the students have got it right. But this cannot be achieved without a struggle and it's equally important to allow for writing which shows them *on the way* to clear perceptions – missing connections and making mistakes.

It may be that teachers often have their own patterns of knowledge so clearly fixed in their minds – about a particular text or series of events or sequence of experiments or whatever – that they just don't realize the learner's need to break these patterns down in order to come to grips with their meaning – their significance – *by a process of reconstruction.*

Writing can have many purposes and writing down the 'basic facts' is only one of them. Finding out what you think, what you make of the

facts, is another – and being free to use your own words, close to talk in all probability at this discovery stage, may be crucial to the undertaking. Nobby was puzzled and somewhat resentful that expressions like 'The story becomes less complicated *second time around*' had been underlined, or '*make it*' because the teacher preferred 'conveyed'.

So there Nobby is, in his first year in the sixth form, experiencing feelings of frustration, bewilderment and regret at not being able to communicate his thoughts more effectively. Even if he was being encouraged to think in his own words, grasping the import of his A-level studies in English and History would not be easy. It would still take time and involve considerable discussion with the teacher and the rest of the group; using language that he was comfortable with would not magically enable Nobby to understand new work immediately, but at least it would make it more possible for him to focus on his own response to it without the constraint of having to consider how the teacher would like him to respond. It may be that by this stage in his schooling it is too late for him to be able to change what has become a habitual looking over his shoulder when he writes. Even so, he can't help feeling that although teachers may be more articulate and have more 'education' than he has, sometimes their priorities are different from his. This is his final comment on our tape:

> I think you should be allowed to express yourself in your simple way, and if it's – well, if it's understandable, then why shouldn't it be marked as it is, not for style or grace or even spelling? If you see a word that's spelt wrong but you know what it means, then I don't think you should be marked on spelling mistakes – you should be marked for what you're thinking about. I don't know. I don't get it.

'The tentative stage'

We give here some examples of kinds of writing which have occurred when teachers have allowed for a wider-than-traditional range of responses from their pupils for the work they are doing. Our first examples are from Science.

1 Sue Watts teaches Chemistry. In addition to the record of experiments which the children keep, she asked her first-year mixed-ability class to keep a *diary* of their work. She reads all that they write, and all that they write goes in their folders, but the diaries are not marked. It is interesting that their diary entries include corrections and evaluative

comments which formal Science records do not allow for. We don't suggest these should be substituted for formal records, but they do contain an important additional aspect of learning. Of course this function can be served by talk, but writing allows for reflection and rewriting to go on relatively uninterrupted, which talk doesn't.

Carol

Today we played another sort of guessing game on one of the benches we had three trays half full of water one was hot one was cold and the middle one was warm. first of all we put our hands into the cold and hot trays then after a minute we put our hands into the middle tray and they felt very different my right hand felt cold and my left hand felt warm but this was wrong because both of them should have felt the same because the water was all the same termperature. After we had done this we were given a thermometer and we found out the temperature of my fingers and my temperature is 35°C.

Ann

In the science laboratory we have been looking at many different things, I was particularly interested in mercury and why it is so heavy. I once learned that you get mercury in a thermometre and that if you drop the thermometre and it smashes all the mercury will spread over the floor and turn into silver balls. You mustn't touch it because it is poisonous. My mother once dropped a thermometre when she was a child and that is how I know.

I was also interested in a piece of lava, and that why it comes out red from a volcano and goes grey after. I found out that heat causes rock to melt and that lava is really molten rock. So that when it spurts out from a volcano it turns back into rock when it cools down. If the red hot lava goes over anything or any one when it cools down it preserves them.

We saw many other things too.

These diaries are in addition to the record of experiments which the children keep. They are important, we think, because they give the children the chance to reflect on what they are doing. Thus Carol thinks that it is 'wrong' that her two hands felt different in the same bowl of water. 'They should,' writes Carol, 'have felt the same'. She is raising for herself a question about the relativenesss of subjective judgments – and thus, presumably, of the need for more accurate scientific measurement.

Ann's writing shows her bringing knowledge from outside school (her mother's story of dropping a thermometer) into relation with what she's doing in her Science lesson. She's making connections and building up a more complete picture for herself.

The language of both these pieces of writing is personal and expressive although both contain a good deal of information. We think that it is important that pupils have the chance to express interest in what they are doing, to bring in other bits of knowledge which they have and to try to explain in their own words what they understand or have experienced.

2 Kenneth is a second-year boy in a multiracial comprehensive school. His teacher asked the class to record in a personal log their thoughts and feelings about what they had been doing in Environmental Studies. He hoped to set up a written dialogue, adding his comments on their log entries.

Kenneth

This term I've learnt about the country side after are visit to burghill farm in sussex from which I learnt alot how the cows were milked and how it was transport it to the tanker. And enclosers which effected people's life. I learnt about iron, conditions of work, mines power and inventions. I fill that I have learnt a lot than I did in my primary school. I enjoy english and enquiry but some times it's hard to think like know because people are chattering away happily. I learn by listening to the teacher and reading books I think about it then write it in my own words. I think that the class should be split into half (the people who want to work and the people who don't). But I must be honest some time's me and robert stop working for a minute or two and have a chat after some hard work then we start work again. I am most intrested in english when we do play's but I think that to many people write plays and every one starts shouting and arguring. I think that I work quite good as I enjoy my work. I think that the industrial revolation changed alot of peoples life's like Willaim Wilkins when his land was taken away from him by the squire and had it enclosed. He had to change the whole of his life style. He had to grow extra food to live on then he sold it to Nottingham the nearest town: I don't think it's fare to change the life style you alway's know just for the squire and a few rich farmers. The working conditions of 18th century life was terrible

having to live in four rooms and going to a out sick [?], and children from the age of 5 having to go to work in factorys and mines.

Teacher
Children don't work now – thay have an 'education' in schools – What does this mean to you personally.

Kenneth
I think that education is a good thing you learn alot about the world if you had no education you wouldnt find a good job with money because every thing is going up. I personally think every one should have education.

3 Deborah is a fifth-year student at a comprehensive school. She gave these 'Unspoken conversations' to her English teacher a few days after he had had the chat with her which is the subject of her first 'conversation'.

He was delighted that in this way there had been a breakthrough in communication with her. He had sensed (rightly!) that behind her usual reserve a lot of very powerful feelings and thoughts were at work.

Clearly she was *not* in this instance writing for the 'teacher as examiner'; this is the very audience that she feels so frustrated and angry about! Equally it may well have been impossible for her to say what she felt as vividly as this in face-to-face talk.

By choosing to write in the expressive for a teacher she felt angry with but had also come to trust, she has reflected clearly the dilemma that many students pressured by teachers' expectations often find themselves in.

Unspoken conversations Deborah
Mr Jones is a *little* disapointed with my MCT questions result in the mock O level (MCT: Multiple Choice Test.)
'This is a grade 'B' – but you will be aiming for an 'A' next year?'
(Don't change facial expression – give nothing away.)
'Yes Mr Jones.'
(For God's sake what do you think I am – infallible? Just because I can write he's disapointed because I only got a 'b' grade in his poxy

exam. Go to Hell. I don't live up to other peoples standards I live up to mine.)

'Those MCT questions – I know the exam room was noisy – you seemed to lose concentration at intervals.'

(Stare out of the window, appear disinterested. No reply. Let him think what he wants. I didn't lose concentration. I did my utmost best with those questions, but it wasn't good enough was it? They were bloody difficult and I'm not the genius you think I am. You need common sense and the powers of intricate deduction to answer questions like that. And I don't happen to possess those powers – so sorry – I fell a little short of your expectations didn't I?)

'This essay is good – but you didn't manage to finish it – you lost marks for that, you'll have to learn the art of finishing things. Do you think you'll manage to do that next year? – I know its against your principles but . . .

'No'

(nothing dramatic, don't look at him. Remain aloof. Of course its against my principles. I'm a writer not a bloody automaton. Does he think I can sit down and churn out a polished grade A essay, finished mind you, finished – in 45 minutes? I write what I want and when I have something to say. Anything else is third rate, boring, unfinished and unoriginal. I don't know what you're complaining about. Grade B is brilliant, considering that under exam conditions I'm no better than any average candidate. I can't switch on this ability of mine y'know. It comes and goes. I wrote nothing for about 4 months – remember? Everything just went. It's just about coming back now – but I'm not in control. I'M NOT IN CONTROL.)

'Well you really shouldn't have tackled a story that you get too deeply into – Perhaps a description would have suited you better – something you could have finished?'

Short silence. (What; does he want me to say something? Perhaps ask him where I went wrong? Advice on how not to get a grade 'B' in your mock O level? Don't you see? I don't care, I don't give a damn about what grade I get? I don't care if its the lowest possible pass, I don't care if its CSE. Just so long as I've got those stupid bits of paper to wave under an employers nose. I've already got enough people arranging my life for me – I don't need another. And especially not you. I would have expected it from anyone but you.)

'Here you are then.'

'What have I got to keep it?'

(all non-commital stuff this)

'Yea present for you'
(Thanks for nothing)
'Thankyou.'

At the end of her piece Deborah wrote the following to her teacher:

Well – here it is – the first piece of writing I've ever given you that's about myself – Whats your reaction?
No lectures – *Please*

'The comparative certainty of knowledge . . .'

When a writer is sure of his knowledge he is able to use a more public (and formal) language – with understanding. Here is Frances, aged fourteen, writing – for a younger child who has not done any Science – an explanation of what diffusion is.

We all know that gases are invisible, in other words we can't see it there but it is present. Gases are made up of molecules, for the moment, let us call Molecules 'Marbles'. These marbles are present in solids as well, but here they are squeezed together and are unable to move. But in a gas the marbles (which cannot be seen with the human eye, only with an electronic microscope) move about freely and do not move in one specific direction, they move at random.

What we must understand is that some gases are heavier than others, air weighs very little. If we got two gases, one being a heavy gas and the other l light and allowed them to mix together, we would expect the heavy gas to fall to the bottom. This prediction is in fact wrong. To prove this if we take a baking tray, and put some big marbles on and some small marbles on it and shake. The marbles will move all over the place in any direction, even though the big marbles are heavier than the small ones. Now all we need to do is to put back molecules where we used to have marbles. When we allow any two gases to mix together, they will mix and not separate as we once thought. This is called Diffusion.

Assessment of written work

> The teacher who aims to extend the pupil's power as a writer must therefore work first upon his intentions, and *then* upon the techniques appropriate to them. (Bullock Report, Chapter 11, p. 164)
>
> A child should not be made to feel that it does not pay to take risks. The teacher's first response to a piece of writing should be personal and positive. Only after responding to *what* has been said is it reasonable to turn attention to *how*. (Bullock Report, Chapter 11, p. 167)

Twenty-five years ago

Here first is an essay from a twelve-year-old girl's exercise book. It was written in 1950. We print it with the corrections and comments made by the teacher.

'*Flats are preferable to houses or vice versa*' – a schoolgirl's point of view

I would hate to live in a flat for several reasons. For one thing after living in a house, where I have my own bedroom, desk and drawers, it would seem awful to live with my mother and father in only two or three rooms, I wouldn't know where to put anything hardly.

Besides, in a flat, I could never have a big party for my friends, like I do at home, I would only be able to invite one or two people.

It would be awful not to be able to keep Bonzo, my dog, or Jack and Jill my rabbits, and I don't see how I could very well if I lived in a flat, with no big garden in which to keep them.

When I am struggling with my homework I like to be quiet. In a flat you can't stop people from switching their wireless on. How would I look, vainly trying to do a complicated problem in Maths with next door's wireless gaily blaring out the latest jazz music.

Write words in full

It would be awful to live in a FURNISHED flat, I would hardly dare touch anything at all. Just think if I scratched the furniture or made a mark on the wallpaper, how awful I would feel! We might even have to pay for it, then I *would* get into trouble.

Flats are usually in towns. People who love the country like me would hate that. Every time you looked out of the window seeing rows and rows of roofs, and mill chimneys. Ugh! Especially in the school hols having to take a bus ride to ever see a tree.

In flats there are usually no other girls or boys to play with. How horrible not to be able to play outside in summer, at rounders, or something like that, when you had finished your homework!

B+

From the viewpoint of 1975 and the Bullock Report we asked ourselves what messages are carried by the way this teacher responded to this essay?

It looks messy – the teacher's markings imply that there is little respect for the writing of the pupil as it stands.

The 'imperatives' in the margin suggest a teacher as examiner approach.

The writing is meant to be from 'a schoolgirl's point of view' – so why not the colloquialisms like 'Just think if . . .' or word order like 'People who love the country like me . . .'? Equally abbreviations like 'Maths' and 'hols'. But there is no realization or acceptance on the part of this teacher that writing could be close to talk.

There is no response to the quality of the writing which captures living experience. The message seems to be that you've got to know the rules. Two of them are put in the margin.

The mark is B+ (a good mark). This would seem to be contradicted by the corrections and remarks. So writing is pretty mysterious and difficult. Better cut out what you really think and concentrate on the rules.

70

It still goes on

We wondered how much things had changed in twenty-five years and collected in some books and folders from a number of schools. Our next piece comes from a fifteen-year-old boy's CSE folder produced during 1975–6.

The Hunt (Martin)

A small fox was playing in the woods with various odds & ends that he found lying around when he heard a sound that sent a chill down his spine, it was the sound of dogs barking & he knew they were after him. So he started to run. but he had nowhere much to run to & not much time so he ran towards the thick part of the wood that is more like a jungle than a wood. He ran as fast as his legs would carry him, though the hounds were gaining on him, but he made it to the thick part of the wood which would help him, & slow the huntsmen & dog's down. He ran through bushe's, bramble's, pile's of leave's & hedge's, he leaped fallen tree's & pieces of rubbish left by stupid untidy picnicer's that had visited the wood's. He ran along tree trunks, & the narrowist of path's between tree's, through barbed wire and under gates but still he could hear that awful yaping of the hound's & the sound of horn's and shout's of huntsmen urging the dogs & horses to go faster. By now the little fox was beginning to get tired so he ran towards an old house where he knew there was a hole in the wall for him to hide in. He reached it and rushed into the house & hid in his hole. There he waited shaking & nearly frightened to death. He knew they would find him and kill him.

The hound's were getting closer & closer & he knew death was near, but then a funny thing happened: the sound of the hound's was getting further away, they weren't chasing him any more, or maybe they were chasing something else & not him. Anyway to him it didn't matter, it wasn't his turn to die.

Why the apostrophe's?

?

C

I'm not V impressed. Your work is MEDIOCRE, lacking real control or care. You will force me to take the matter up with other staff unless you produce work of higher quality.

Perhaps the teacher who marked this piece had had a bad day. It happens. Perhaps Martin was a handful in class. We don't know. Furthermore he is preparing for CSE, so his teacher was probably particularly anxious about points of detail like apostrophes. But, it is essentially the same kind of assessment that was being used in the essay in 1950:

> There is no apparent interest in the story Martin wrote. It is about a hunted fox and there is scope to comment positively on the way the feelings of the hunted animal have been captured and realized in the details of the chase through the forest. But it peters out as though the writer had lost interest or decided to finish it off in any old way. We think a question about why this was so might have put the focus on the content and also carry a clear message that it was the *story* that was at issue.
>
> Ringing the first seven apostrophes won't help the writer to sort out when they should be used. Really all they do is to signal the teacher's irritation.

Marking and assessment of children's written work remain a very vexed question, as the two pieces that follow show.

Barbara Zussman and the fourth- and fifth-year students she talked to suggest that even where the work is initiated by the teacher, the students need to understand the teacher's requirements and standards of assessment – what makes it good or bad in the teacher's judgment. In short, more mutual participation in assessment. And this is what John Blanchard is saying also when he writes: 'What we are looking for is the encounter between teacher and pupils as learning people all' – always acknowledging that teacher and pupils are different.

'Just a tick is hopeless'
by Barbara Zussman

> When I get a piece of work back and I think it's good and I get a bad mark I feel like frotiling the teacher.

Thus responded a fourth-year pupil in an all-boys class in a south-east London comprehensive school to my question, 'How do you feel when you get back a piece of written work marked by a teacher?' A classmate expressed himself even more explicitly:

Say you get 6 out of 10, you say to yourself if you thought you did a good piece of work, 'What a sod!'

According to the classroom teacher, the sixteen boys in the group I talked with were of generally low ability. They would be in a 'B to D' group if the students were streamed. Nevertheless, they were able to express their feelings very clearly.

If you have spent hours on a piece of work, and the teacher just puts a tick to it, I feel like I won't want to do any more good work. On the other hand if I just rush through a piece of work and get a tick for it I feel pleased. But if the work has been given a comment like 'Are you sure you have done half an hour' and you have taken all that evening I feel like walking out on the class. But getting a very good mark makes makes me brag on about it for weeks. (Alan)

What I do not like is when I get a bit of work back which I have worked on quite hard and I just get a little red tick. It often makes you wonder whether the teacher has really marked properly and not just glancing through it so he is in time to go out. I would like to see the teachers honest opinion on you and your work. I would obviously not like it if the teacher put rubbish on the work if I thought it was good but I would really like the teachers honest opinion. (Douglas)

It was apparent from some of the responses that the boys wanted the marking system to be a continuation of the teaching process so that they could improve in the future:

. . . if I get a bad mark well then that makes me fill confused. Don't relly know wat went wrong.

Or, even more specifically:

I think that when some work is going to be marked I don't think the teacher should mark it by her or his self. But it should be marked by the teacher and the pupil. After they have talked about it and by doing this I think it can help the teacher and the pupil. (Nicholas)

My discussion with these boys and their written reaction to my question made me stop to consider my own practices as an English teacher. Perhaps it was time to put aside my red pencil for a while. It was certainly time to find out more about students' responses to the way

we mark their papers. My research into recent literature was not very productive. I found reports of only two studies, both conducted in the United States. The first, in 1967 (Stiff 1967), was concerned with first-year college students who expressed a preference for a grading system which marked errors in the margin where they occurred and also included instructor's comments at the end. (Interestingly enough, no one method of marking papers seemed to have any significant effect on improving student writing.)

The second study, in 1972 (Gee 1972), was conducted in a High School with students in eleventh grade (roughly equivalent to fifth or lower-sixth year). The investigator concluded that negative criticism and no comment caused students to write less than those who were praised; that student attitudes toward writing and their self concepts as capable writers were significantly affected by teachers' written comments; that students would work more patiently for reward and encouragement.

Whatever one feels about the value of small-scale studies as indicators for changes in teacher practices, one paragraph in the report kept my mind on the questions raised there by the sixteen boys in south-east London:

> Whatever the teacher's marks, the student will respond. The teacher can be assured that his comments influence the attitudes the student had about a particular composition and his comments will likely contribute one way or another to the expectations the student has about becoming an adequate writer.

I continued my discussion with another fourth-year class in an all-girls grammar school in London. This time I asked the students not only to express their feelings but also to suggest the way they would like their papers to be marked. The eleven girls were quite unanimous in their main points:

1 In a disliked subject, a good mark can be encouraging, but a bad mark doesn't matter much one way or another.
2 In a favourite subject, a good mark is very encouraging, but a bad mark is really disheartening.
3 Teachers should mark on the basis of each student's individual ability and not by comparing one with another.
4 Teachers should be fair and allow students to have their own opinions even if they differ from the teacher's.

5 Teachers should always write comments on papers to explain errors that were made.

I also had an opportunity to talk with a class of fifth-year girls in the same school. There was a much greater variety of response with this group. They did, however, agree overwhelmingly that explanatory comments were necessary if they were to improve – and obviously they were aware of end-of-year exams. Several suggested they would like a teacher to go through the work with them orally, an idea also suggested by Nicholas earlier.

> The best way for teachers to mark written papers would be firstly to give some sort of mark. Then instead of just writing at the bottom questions that should have been answered in the essay add the points themselves for obviously if I had known the answers I would have put them. (Julie)
>
> Comments are better than marks they tell you more. They give a complete analysis of the work done wrong or missed out. A mark only tells you that you left something out but not what or how you could improve. (Jane)
>
> By just writing something like 'Rubbish' at the bottom, they are not gaining anything and nor are we. (Susan)
>
> I think that the comment is more important, because it tells you more about the work good and bad. I think that just a tick is hopeless. It only signifies that it has been looked at, not whether it is good or bad. (Lesley)

Obviously I, too, was working with a very small sample, but I feel that I gained enough information to see that students are asking to be treated as individuals whose groping attempts to meet our requirements are worthy of consideration and respect. I think they are saying, 'Take the time to explain to us what we are doing or not doing to come up to your standards and we'll try. Otherwise you are just turning us off!'

'Pupils are participants . . .'
John Blanchard writes:

1 'Correcting' pupils' language sets up or maintains an attitude of the teacher as possessor of knowledge and judge of the pupils' performance: such an attitude, embodied in 'correction', denies the pupils autonomy as learners. It perpetuates an unnatural relationship between teacher and pupils in the sense that the teacher is absolved from involvement in the learning process: he merely has knowledge and judges; teaching, he does not learn: whereas the pupils are participants in the learning process, active subjects and, at the same time, objects of assessment and instruction. In such instruction-correction teaching the teacher initiates a process and then stands back leaving the pupils to perform.
2 If the teacher wants to get away from the kind of attitude and teaching outlined above, he has to do more than merely stop correcting. Merely not correcting creates a vacuum where previously the teacher was judge, possessor of knowledge etc. And worse, by not correcting, the teacher possibly makes his position as judge and so on disturbingly problematical for the pupils by not revealing his knowledge.
3 What we are looking for is the encounter between teacher and pupils as learning people all. We seek the encounter between the pupils' outlook, experience and representation of their experience and the teacher's. We acknowledge that teacher and pupils are different – different individuals, different in age, status and experience – and we seek to encourage growth in learning through the encounter of those differences. The teacher has to be aware of language if the pupils are to become more aware.
4 Discussion, in which the teacher is participant in the sense that the pupils are (and different as indicated above), is one means of encouraging the learning encounter.

The best approach is for the teacher to go over the pupil's work with him, discussing persistent errors, suggesting solutions where the writing has run into difficulties, and talking over alternative ways of phrasing something. In much of the writing that takes place in school the pupil's first attempt is expected to be the finished article; there is not enough encouragement of the idea of a first draft to be followed by a second, more refined production. Merely to assign a grade to every piece of writing works against the notion of writing as communication. (Bullock Report, Chapter 11, p. 167)

References

GEE, Thomas C. (1972), 'Student responses to teacher comments' in *Research into the Teaching of English* 6

STIFF, Robert (1967), 'The effect upon student composition of particular correction techniques' in *Research into the Teaching of English* 1

77

3 First moves towards a policy for learning through writing

Teachers who are already involved in 'language policy' discussions in their schools will be well aware that the strategies for initiating discussion and sustaining it need to be thought out carefully. That is why we have decided to base this section on what a group of Humanities teachers from one school did when they started to look at writing together. The teacher who organized the meetings and the collection of children's writing that the group made, was at the time in charge of the school's remedial department.

About six teachers were voluntarily involved, all of them working on an integrated Humanities syllabus with first- to third-year pupils. Their work was topic based for part of the time so that, for instance, they all worked jointly from a unit of work called 'In the beginning' at the start of the first year and followed this with other 'common' themes like 'Fossils' and 'Dinosaurs' based on booklets and worksheets which they wrote jointly. In addition, all the Humanities teachers had additional time which they used to encourage children to follow their own interests in talk and in writing.

One of the Project team, Pat D'Arcy, worked with the group regularly for half a term helping to select writing and joining in the discussions over that period. Sometimes these were held after school in the staffroom and sometimes more convivially over wine and cheese at one of the teacher's homes. Subsequently the group extended their collection as a result of the points that had been raised between them in the hopes that some kind of documentation could be made which would be of use to new teachers when they joined the department.

In the context of the Bullock Report, we think that their collection of writing and the approach which they made to it may also be of interest more widely to other teachers. We haven't space here to include all the writings which were discussed but our selection reflects the range from which they drew. Unfortunately, tapes were not kept of the actual discussions, but wherever possible we give the context for the writing as it

was recorded by the teachers, believing it to be essential to any consideration of the value of what has been written. After each piece we have added a brief commentary which gives some indication of the points that could be raised about it. The concerns of these teachers as a group were very similar to our concerns as a project – to find out, if they could, what use (if any) the writing had been to the writer.

Points of departure

(Made by the group in their introduction to the writings)

* We were interested in trying to discover the range of writing that was done in Humanities, its successes and failures, and ways in which we, as teachers, could learn from what children wrote.

* Some of the writing is part of a course planned by the teacher . . .

* Some of the writing was initiated by the children themselves from their own interests or needs.

* Much of a child's ability to use writing opportunities to the full depends on his command of and ease in using his own language. English in the broadest sense is thus central to successful work in Humanities.

* It is often the *development* of children's language ability that is a problem to teachers.

* We wanted to work out how we could help children to develop their writing to explore the various relationships they can take up with many possible audiences – and to make their writing more effective for whatever purpose they have in mind.

* We hope that this collection of writings will give rise to an awareness of the variety of children's language abilities and of the need to provide different opportunities for writing.

Teacher-initiated writing

A great deal of writing in any school is initiated by the teachers and Wreake Valley is no exception. We have chosen pieces from the collection which reflect different aspects of work in the Humanities and which also show the various purposes which such writing can serve – from the pupil's point of view, as well as from the teacher's original intentions.

1066 and all that

(All the classes are 'mixed ability'.) This second-year class had been answering a worksheet based on reading they had done about this period of British History. The first two questions on the sheet had asked for information about the battle of Stamford Bridge and the reasons why King Harold was unable to stop William landing at Pevensey. Then came a 'question' which was phrased 'Imagine you were a soldier in one of the armies at the battle of Hastings and write your own account of the battle'. Here is what three children wrote in reponse to these three questions. We are interested in the brevity of the replies to the first two questions and the different ways in which they took up the invitation to put themselves in the picture in the third question.

Norman Conquest

1 What happened at Stamford bridge is that King Harold was caught by surprise by King Harold Norway and tostig, and all day a great battle fought

2 Harold was unable to prevent William from landing at peversney because he had just fought a battle and he was tired out.

3 The atmosphere was tense as our army the normans were lining up for the great battle. 'Charge' the echoeing call haunted my mind as our armies charged at each other like aswarms of hornets. Clash, the spurring clanged against each other. causing bright sparks. I saw one of my mates fall, for a spear had pierced his armgur, and I felt like kneeling to his aid but I knew this was hopeless. So I just charged along with the rest of my comrades. Again we couldn't break the english defence formation: Blood was now a common sight as men on each side was beginning to fall. I dodged to the side of the horse, to miss a whistling spear that was heading straight for me and I sighed to myself with relief. Suddenly I was aware about a rumour that our idol Willaim Conquerer was dead. I felt sick at the heart, and afew people started panicking: Suddenly

Willaim rode out in front of the army and, and shouted 'look I'am still alive'. This gave us extra punch and we charged again All at once I felt a short shap pain in my arm, I looked in dispair to see my armour sleeve gradually fill with blood. I didn't let this down me, and we eventually we tricked the english into breaking their strong battle formation and this is the break we needed, and we marched on to victory: By now my strength had been dragged from me, and as I slumped down on the littered battlefield, I gave anod of satisfaction for what I had done and with that word I die.

This girl is doing more with her writing in answer to this question than to the previous two, both of which elicited brief 'information retrieval' replies. In response to 'Imagine you were . . .' she has done some thinking of her own about what it would have been like to be at the battle involved in a fight to the death. The focus of her attention is on feelings from the start. In some respects, though, this could have been any battle. How much does this matter? Should the teacher discount her 'answer' because historically it is too vague and general? Is the act of imagining what it might be like to die in battle with your friends dying round you also of some value? Has the teacher, faced with worksheet answers from the whole class, time to make any kind of individual response?

In the next piece which the teacher put into the collection, the writer has combined more of the factual details with a similar exploration of feeling. Was this a conscious choice on his part or just a happy chance? How often again have we the time (or the inclination) in the course of a busy school day to find out from pupils why they wrote what they did?

Medieval Life cont.
At Stamford bridge King Harold of England won a decisive victory over Earl Tostig and King Harold of Norway. Both the latter being killed. This victory however cost him dearly in men and time.

The Battle of
The Normans were very confident as they went into battle. 'There's William' said the captain. If only he was within range I thought I'd let him have it with my axe. He wasn't so we had to wait till. . . . A flight of arrows flew at us I instinctively over my face and chest and waited. The leather that covered the wooden shields smelt like home on the farm and for a moment I thought of my home. I was snapped

out of my dream by athump on my shield on my shield. I thought its a good job I have a shield. The person behind me was dead an arrow in his stomach. One or two others were dead but the casualties weren't very high. I went to pull the arrow out when up the hill I saw charging normans. I waited till they were nearly on us then I hurled a javelin into the ranks. I didn't really mean to watch what happened. But somehow I just lowered my shield and peeped over the top. I couldn't see my javelin it could have been one of hundreds sticking dead horses. Normans shields or armour or even one of the few sticking in the faces of the Normans. Then I pulled out my axe and hacked at the Normans. They hacked back but I took most of the blows on my shield. This kept on and then the Normans retreated but a man road amongst them and again they came. Then unfortunately the normans hit on a trick they ran off many men followed them the normans turned and cut them to pieces they kept doing this till the ranks of the English were depleated. I gather with the house Carlos (being Harold's bodyguards). And we tried to defend him. he was killed by an arrow we couldn't stop. Most of the men knew that battle was lost and ran we knew they would never make it to the woods and safety. I stayed with the housecarles (about a hundred men) with a few others we knew it was all in vain but I would never run. In the face of death I felt a strange madness. I wasn't scared to die but I wanted to take many normans with me. I hacked at the oncoming hordes I think I took 15 men with me but one couldn't miss them they just had to come on the masses behind them were forcing them to ride straight at us. Our ranks had thinned down to about fifty. The flag of king Harold a red dragon flew in the middle of us. Then the man who was holding it fell I caught the flag and once again it flew in the middle of us. The flag made me the target of every Norman sword and spear. Suddenly there was a blow on the side of my head and mist blew in front of my eyes. The last thing I ever saw on earth was a housecarle taking the flag from me.

We were not seeking in our discussions to evaluate whether contributions to our growing collection of writing were 'good' or 'bad' so much as trying to work out how each piece came to be written as it did. At the most obvious level neither of these pieces would have been written if there had not been that particular suggestion on the worksheet. Less obviously, how is it that this boy is able to conjure up so vividly this picture of the battle – even down to the farmyard smell of leather shields? Is it partly because he enjoys reading stories as well as writing

them and could both these activities come to him easily because he already possesses a lively and fertile imagination? What else in his own pool of experience is he drawing on? There are one or two puzzles which again there may never be time for a busy teacher to find out about. What has made him think that these events were 'medieval' – and why does he put 'The battle of . . .' and then stop? Did he temporarily forget the name (not the battle of *Hastings* surely . . .) or was he just distracted? Or does the blank suggest perhaps, that he never reads through what he has written once it is down on the page?

The third example selected from responses to this question is much shorter – one sentence, in fact, and a drawing. Why is this? Is it because this pupil is just not interested and therefore can't be bothered? Or is he so influenced by the worksheet structure that he assumes all the answers must be short – or is there a reflection here of the kind of writing found in picture cartoons? How much imagining has gone on behind this brief caption? Could it be the kind of 'encapsulation' that Sylvia Ashton Warner talks about that often occurs in the writing of young children? Why is the language so different in the two short remarks that he does put onto paper? Again, how should the teacher-as-reader respond – critically ('hopelessly inadequate')? With curiosity, trying to find answers to some of these questions, trying to think of questions that it would be useful to ask – or as happened in this instance, with a fairly neutral tick?

The Invasion
Harold was unable to prevent the Normans from landing at Peversney because he was at the battle of Stamford Bridge.

The Battle

We marched towards hastings led by our great King, King Harold little did he know he was doomed to death. ✓

The next two examples of writing were also produced in response to worksheet suggestions by second-year boys. This time the 'worksheet' was in fact four A4 sheets stapled together and the theme was contemporary – how many people have little choice about where they live, particularly poor people? The first half of the pamphlet was about a family called the Butlers who lived in a tenement block called Barnaby Buildings. Each page had a sketch of the place or one of the characters surrounded by bits of writing about them. Here is Mrs Butler's page:

Mrs Butler
Her baby died and she tried to kill herself.

"I had this bottle of pheno-barbitone. I was going to take the lot.

'I couldn't stand the feeling I had that if we had not been living here I wouldn't have lost the baby. But my husband must have had some sixth sense because that was one of the few mornings that he got up early and he caught me while I'd still got them in my mouth and he made me spit them out.

My relations only live a few miles away but I haven't seen them for years and my husband won't even write to his mother. He says when we move we'll write to them all and they can all come and see us in our new place.

Rows here aren't like ordinary married rows. You dig right to what you know is going to hurt. So does everybody else. You can hear them. These walls are so thin you can hear your neighbours turn on a switch.

Most weekends when they can't go out are absolute murder, five of us stuck in here all day.

We are living like criminals.

1 Why don't the Butlers see their relatives?
2 Write a story/poem/diary of an ordinary day in Mrs Butler's life.
3 Do you like privacy? Why.

In response to the three questions/suggestions on Mrs Butler's page Adam had written in his exercise book:

Mrs Butler
The butlers do not want to see there relatives while in slum conditions.

Slum Life
Wake up, open a tin of beans
Shout to your husband baby and kids
Set them off to school and (husband to) work
husband down to the labour exchange,
Then you are alone,
Really alone,
With slum life
catching up with you
without your husband's pay and
a nice house
Your meek and your tired
You need a way out
it would be so easy to take
that pill
You could but your husbands
much too fast to take that test
And these children that you
cry on, what will they be
when they leave school
If they are smart the'll leave –
or the'll be a dead end children

3. I like privacy as you can do what
you like without the comments/criticisms
of others.

As in the first two 'King Harold' pieces the response which has involved the writer most fully has been the imaginative one which has allowed him to deal with feelings as well as facts. Perhaps it is the only

one of the three 'answers' which needs to be written down rather than said. If the other two questions had been answered orally perhaps a discussion would have developed which would have been more useful or, at any rate, more interesting than Adam's single sentence. In writing, *questions* seem to elicit shorter answers than *suggestions* – added to which there is an inevitable time gap between question and answer which must sometimes make it seem a rather fruitless occupation, especially as the pupil is often not discovering anything new about what he thinks in his reply. On the other hand, imagining Mrs Butler's reactions to her situation *needs thinking about*. It has to be explored, created consciously inside this boy's head for the first time. The time given by any one student to this kind of exploration may depend on all sorts of things – how soon he is expected to 'finish' the writing, how much distraction there is from other members of the group, how far other questions also succeed in making demands on his thinking.

In the group of answers that we quote next from this pamphlet, the cartoon probably took at least as much time and involvement as the previous answer. The page in the booklet was headed 'Graveyard with Lights' and on it attention shifts from old slum buildings to the problems of living on vast new estates – chiefly by means of a Punch cartoon which shows two tiny figures gazing up at enormous, faceless, towering blocks of flats. The caption reads 'Wave Bye Bye to Gran'. These were the questions/suggestions at the bottom of the page:

(a) What do you think the artist means in this cartoon – is it really funny?
(b) Imagine that your family has been forced to go and live in a block of flats like the one above. You are on the eighth floor. Write about your life there; where could you play? Could you make much noise in the building? How would you get up and downstairs? Would you meet many people? What advantages or disadvantages would there be?
(c) Try and draw your own cartoons about living in tower blocks.

Here is what Dave wrote and drew:

(a) I don't think anything to it and its not really funny.
(b) We have been put on the eighth floor of a block of flats and we have to play on the forecourt. We use a lift to get down and up and its good fun playing in them

I have made five friends, they all live on this floor
We play football twice a week against six kids on the seventh floor. we haven't lost yet.
Sometimes we are late for school because the lift sometimes conks out.

(c)

That particular booklet illustrates well the variety of approaches to a topic that a Humanities team can offer. What perhaps we need to try and work out more carefully as teachers is the variety of *mediums* that

we can also put on offer as possible ways of responding. The 'blanket' medium for a response to all these questions was writing in an exercise book. If talking about them, or working on tape or modelling or painting had also been possible means of expression it may be that the issues would have been explored more fully. Primary schools where the teacher lives in the same room with the same children for most of every day, are still more likely, however, to be able to provide these facilities *simultaneously* than secondary schools, even when, as in this case, the school is a 'purpose built' comprehensive with teachers working together in teams.

Our next two pieces come from first-year Humanities work on Creation and show one girl 'myth-making' and another trying to make sense of someone else's very complicated theories about how planets were formed.

My Creation Story

For a hundred years god was drawing a plan for the world. God said 'at last I have finished the plan for the world now to get to work'. So god got to work. First god made a garden and called it the garden of worldin. God put plants in the garden and then animals and fishes. When the garden was finished god decided to make a man so god took one of his fingers and made a man. God said 'I will give every man four fingers' so the first man had five fingers because he had one of gods fingers. God said 'I will give every man one thumb. When god had finished the man he put him in the garden. God took one of mans fingers and got six animals hairs and made a woman. God gave every man and woman the gift of sex. God decided to make the wether. God got 1,000000 horses and made them run on the spot. That's how god made thunder. God had a very big garden in the sky. When god watered his garden the water soaked through the ground until it came out of the sky on to our earth. thats how god made the rain. God had a bright orange ball. God put the orange ball on to a very big fire. The ball grow so big it rolled off the earth and in to space. When it got into space the ball carried on growing until it was 1,000 times bigger than the earth. The ball stayed alight in space so god called it the sun. God had put a magnet inside the ball and as the ball got bigger the magnet got bigger so thats how god made gravity.

The End By J. E. Miller

Sir James Jeans theory (Yvonne)

there are few stars know that are a little bigger than the earth they are very big and could fit Earths and Earths in with sum room. and the total number of stars is probaly the same amount as grains of sands on all the beashes are living space is very little compered to the total universe there are lots and lots of stars wandering in space a few groups journey in company but most are lonely travellers and they travel through universe so much that it is not thought rarity for a star to come anywhere near another star we believe that 2000000 years ago it took place that a star went within hailing distance of the sun but they would be different but they would be very different from the puny tides wich the small mass of moon rises in our oceans a huge wave travelled of the survice and before the star began to recede its tidal pull had become so powerful that this mountain was born to pieces and threw of small fragments of itself much as the crest of a wave throws of spray. These fragments circle their sun There are planets big and small wich our earth is one.

What has been the purpose of these two pieces of writing and what value have they been to the writers? In the first, the writer is inventing a story about how God (in the image of man) created the world, in very 'primitive' human terms. 'J. E. Miller' seems to take up a storytelling voice very easily. Along with her class, she had read creation myths from various countries and the story form is already familiar to her from all kinds of other sources. She knows that in stories it doesn't matter whether what she says is true in a logical and scientific sense. Stories above all are for enjoyment – they have to be ingenious or funny or sad in a way that can be shared with an appreciative audience. We can imagine J's piece being shared with a group of friends or even the whole class in this way.

Yvonne is taking on a very different job. Sir James Jeans' theory about how the planets were created had been printed in their 'In the beginning' booklet; this is her first (and probably only) attempt to come to grips with it by re-stating the theory for herself. Her problem is that she only has the other person's words (and drawing) to go on. As we can see from what she writes, as yet, the ideas behind the words are still – and not surprisingly – only half grasped. What Yvonne has written *could* be useful if the teacher has time to go through it carefully with her – probing in more detail the picture of creation that at this point she has in her head and expanding or sorting it out with her at greater length in talk. Potentially she could learn more from the start she has made here on thinking about someone else's thinking than J. Miller learnt from making up her own myth, although this too presumably has its value – an issue that Humanities teachers might like to take up and discuss further.

Our last example of teacher-initiated writing from the collection comes from Mark, a twelve-year-old boy who found writing still an almost impossible medium to use. He was in one of the remedial groups for this reason; his teacher had mentioned to him that she knew almost nothing about fishing and thought that he was probably rather knowledgeable about it. We were all interested at the time in the response that pupils might make to any audience which didn't place the teacher in the position of the expert who 'knew it all' anyway and in this piece Mark seemed to us to have gained some confidence to try and express what he knew because on this occasion he saw himself as the expert; we type his version with orthodox spellings in brackets. The point is that though incorrectly spelt, his communication *was* in fact comprehensible – as indeed many mis-spelt writings are to teachers who are looking for what such children have in mind:

The Pike

The pike is a vess (fierce) fish it is manel (mainly) green it has got very big teeth and it eat minow Stikle Back. When it eat the Stikle Back (there are 3 Stikle on the back) the stikles get stock in it mouth so the pike spits it out and it lives for a nother day it ollso eats gochun (gudgeon) and other smoll fish it is olle so a fresh water socke (shark). pike can grow up to 60 pons of wot (pounds of weight). and when it is that Big it can be a big noson (nuisance) I have cought a pike it was only 3 pons But it put up a Big fight you con catch pike on spinner and with pike and forg (frogs) and young duck.

What is clear here is that Mark knew quite a lot about catching pike – and wanted to let his teacher know this sufficiently strongly to tackle telling her in writing. He might have managed the task of writing better in a carefully structured exercise, the difference is that here he is struggling to make writing work for what he wants to communicate – and in spite of all the difficulties, he succeeds.

Self-initiated writing

Many children over a wide ability range made use of the opportunities they were given in Humanities time to write about topics of their own choosing. Stories of all kinds were very popular for instance, sometimes based on work the group had been doing together, sometimes not and we have quoted two of these elsewhere (*Writing and Learning Across the Curriculum 11–16* Ward Lock Educational, 1976). But because we only have limited space here, we have chosen two pieces which are both dominantly expressive, in the sense that they convey, in each case, the writer's own thoughts and feelings very much in her own voice. Both writers appear to be envisaging an audience they can rely on to be interested in the thoughts, ideas and feelings that are expressed; and both were fairly extensive pieces of work. It seems to be much less difficult to handle written language when a real sense of *communicating* is afoot than on other occasions.

Alex's *True Love Stories* is very much about herself – eleven pages laced together to make a booklet with a decorated cover. She told her teacher that it was all true 'except for the last six lines'. The form is really that of a diary, the motivation to write it the pleasure which we have all experienced of reliving what has happened by going over it all again in our minds, remembering what was said and what was done and what it felt like.

Here are the first couple of pages and the last page which resolves the cutting off of the friendship in a satisfyingly dramatic way!

From *True Love Stories*
Dion
I am going out with Dion Payne and I love him a lot. It all started when his younger brother Marwynn fell out with me. I said to my friend

Deana 'I think I want to go out with Dion' and we left it at that till on the way home when Dion came over to me and briony and andrea kept laughing. So I knew andrea was planning something So when Dion had gone I said to her 'you want to go out with Dion don't you she said 'No I wouldn't go out with him so I never said anything else till she had gone and I said to bri 'She does want to go out with him doesn't she' She said 'I don't know but dion wants to go out with her'. I cryed all that night. The next day I asked someone to ask him to go out with me but he said no he would but he was going out with Andrea. That made me mad so I fell out with her. I heard that andrea wasn't well and she wasn't going to youth Club so this was my chance to get Dion to fall out with andrea and go out with me. At youth Club Dion came but he wouldn't go out with me. The next day at school Dion wasn't there and neither was andrea, Dion had gone to the Dentist. . . .

. . . At half past seven I met him and we just stood there in each others arms untill half past Eight then I started to cry he knew why then I said 'I've got to go now' he kissed me and said 'see you next monday'. I ran all the way home crying and I cryed all night. In the morning at about 10 o'clock I heard on the radio that there had been a crash and two boys had been killed Dion payne and Nick Cummings At this I just sat down I cryed.

In talk, this kind of girlfriend-boyfriend gossip is often a compulsive topic of conversation with teenage girls. It reflects some very important aspects of their transition from children to young women and it is not surprising that, when the opportunity occurs, they will explore what has happened, and what might happen, in their writing too. Their responses to these early relationships may seem to us to be stereotyped and boringly predictable, but for them they are a necessary way of dealing with new situations which understandably they feel very unsure about.

The other piece of self-initiated writing that we have chosen to include from the Wreake collection is very different. It is informational and much of it is set out like information, though it includes lists, instructions, questions, even letters to 'the editor'. Above all, the writer's own voice is heard throughout, full of enthusiasm and an expectation of enjoyment from her friends and her teacher for whom she wrote it. We hope the writer's zest for her self-chosen role of 'plant expert' has not disappeared in the cutting we had to do on the twenty-page original.

Flowering plants are always found in almost every-ones home in this country.

They briten our lives up and give us happiness.

They always look beautiful and if you read this book you will learn how to look after them properly.

See the Index
For details

Index

Title	*Page*
The forward	Page 1
Taking a cutting	Page 2
Plant are Needed	Page 3
Diagram	Page 4
Cuttings	Page 5
Attractive flowering plants	Page 6
Attractive non flowering plants	Page 8
Diagram	Page 7
Diagram	Page 9
Questions	Page 10
Poem	Page 11
Advertisement	Page 12
from your editor	Page 13
Make a flower	Page 14
finished Model	Page 15
Writers coments	Page 16
Writers coment	Page 17
Writers coments	18 page
Writers coments	Page 19
Plant of the week	page 20
Odd Bits	Page 21
Odd Bits	Page 22
The End of Index	

Plants

Our project is all about plants we do it in our humanities time at the end of the afternoon. Plants have quite a lot to do with humans, they give us joy they are beautiful and if we did not have plants and trees we would die.

In side the stem of a plant, (or the trunk of a tree) there is a system that is vitally needed by humans.

When we breath in air and then we breath it out again it is no longer air but something else.

This other thing is what the plant breaths in, it breaths through its leaves and then when the plant breaths out it is air again.

By Dawn Green

Plants

How to take a cutting

If you have a rather delightful house plant, then why not take a cutting from it. If you are not aquainted at doing this kind of thing and you have not got 10 green fingers, then just follow the instructions as followed.

Take a pair of sissors and cut a small piece of twig of off your plant. Cut it just in front of the knoch.

Non flowering Plant

Just because a flower does not appear on a plant do not throw it away because you think something has gone wrong with it.

Often a non-flowering plant is nicer than a flowering plant.

Here are a few

Indian rubber plant

The indian rubber plant is a very large plant indeed, its leaves are of dull green and are enormous. You should not, *I Repeat should not* take a cutting from an *Indian rubber Plant*. Unless you are an expert like me. Which takes some doing.

Questions

Questions for you to answer

1 What is it that plants do for us to help us live?
2 How do you take a cutting?
3 Do you plant a cutting, straight away
put it in water
throw it away
4 Are plants alive?
5 Is a plant growing or not growing all the time?
6 How does a plant breath?
7 Does a plant breath through,
Its stem?
Its roots?
Its leaves?
8 Why does a plant drink water?
9 Why do we find plants in many places throughout the world?

10 Just because a plant has no flowers does it mean something is wrong with it?

You should be able to answer these Questions if you read this book.

Continued from Making a flower

You then pull the needle all the way through until the knot reaches the paper you then tie the other side and you then have the head flower.

If you would like a stem cut round the dotted lines and fix it on with selotape. The hole is for your hand to go in.

Colour you flower in

When you have done this blow your flower and it turns.

Turn the page to see the finished model.

Your letters

Dear Editor,

One day I was sat on my summer varrander with nothing to do. Then there was a knock at the door, It was one of my friends.

She said,

I am just going down to the library would you like to come, Oh yes please I said, so we just went down to the library. When I got their I had a look round and saw your book, Well I read the forward, and decided that this was the book for me.

I have now bought a copy for my self and my aunt.

A fanatic on plants

J. R. S. P. Sinker

Write Up

Take a look at the advertisement that I had printed on page 12.

It tells you to think about it.

Have you?

The advertisers words are

One flower is worth a thousand words

These words are coppied on page 12, but the editor desighined the beautiful golden sunflower by the side of the powerful words.

Yours Truely

Your Editor

The thing that made me do this topic was that I wanted to brighten the class room up by growing a few cuttings and bringing them to school. I had already had some expereance in growing some plants at the junior school and the idea seemed to work. After I had done this I decided to write about it and then one thing led to another and in the end I decided to do this magazine.

I apologise for the writing in parts it seems to get very scruffy.

This plant project of Dawn's shows how it is quite possible for a child to move easily and spontaneously from one writing function to another. Parts of it are very expressive and chatty – indeed the writer's own voice is clearly present throughout, enthusiastic in the informative passages and high-spirited in the 'letters' which she makes up to provide the right kind of admiring audience for her work. Making the magazine was a good game but at the same time it enabled Dawn to experiment in a

relaxed way with writing for different purposes and for a number of different audiences. Partly it is for the teacher and occasionally remarks are addressed directly to her; partly it is for her friends in the class and there is also the imaginary 'public' audience ('Dear readers . . .').

Dawn's freedom to move from one writing function to another and to address more than one kind of audience is also reflected in the collection as a whole. We are interested that the removal of clear 'subject' demarcations appears to have encouraged this kind of flexibility, whatever aspect of Humanities the pupils happen to be working on. It is also interesting to speculate whether continuing integration of subjects, taught by a team of teachers across boundaries like this further up the school, would continue to offer the same kind of range – or does the teacher have to become increasingly an 'examiner' and the writing increasingly generalized and classificatory?

Perhaps the widening or the constriction of writing opportunities will most of all depend on the extent to which all teachers are actually aware of all the possibilities – and of their value in offering pupils a variety of approaches to learning. But unless teachers can themselves find opportunities to discuss their pupils' writing with each other, they may (without even realizing it) be operating inside a very limited audience and function range in the written work they set.

That is why we see this kind of writing collection and the discussion that accompanied it as an important 'first move towards a policy for learning through writing'. As the group stressed themselves, it is only a beginning and is in no way seen as presenting an overall picture. Given a continued interest in the part that writing plays in learning, another sampling could look at the work of *individual* students over a period of weeks to see how far a similar range was reflected in their work during that time. Or the group could choose to concentrate on one aspect of writing and map that through the work of the whole department for half a term. A further step might be to set out deliberately to experiment with different audiences and different levels of information.

Basically, any explicit language policy work in a school will reflect this kind of ongoing concern for how learning opportunities are used, either in talk or writing by teachers and pupils. There is no 'endpoint' – pupils change as people; they develop and grow up, and as they grow up and leave school other pupils arrive to replace them. Nothing is ever static –

who we teach, what we teach or who does the teaching. But we don't have to choose between being swept away by the current or damming it up! We can choose instead to study our particular stream and to become familiar with its ecology. We hope that the Wreake teachers have shown how it is possible to make a start.

Some relevant books

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